

OCCASIONAL THOUGHTS

On the Study and Character of

CLASSICAL AUTHORS,

ON THE

COURSE of LITTERATURE,

And the present PLAN of a

LEARNED EDUCATION.

WITH SOME

Incidental Comparisons between

HOMER and OSSIAN.

Antiquorum ingenii, excellentiæ, facultati, nihil detrahimus; sed generi ipsi, viz, instituto, Auctoritati, placitis, necessario derogamus. Immensum enim est, quantum scientiarum progressum deprimant; atque opinio copiæ inter maximas causas inopiæ reperitur.

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Occasional Thoughts

ON THE

STUDY of the CLASSICS, &c.

THERE is not perhaps a question of greater importance to the Republic of Letters, than that concerning the different forms and respective merits of *Ancient* and *Modern* Learning. But unhappily for the cause of truth, the prejudices of mankind are so deeply interested in the dispute, that instead of meeting with any fair disquisition, it has usually been managed with all the heat of party-zeal and undistinguishing animosity. To such a height has this hostile spirit sometimes been carried, that it has thrown the whole literary world into a state of war. And a Wit of the last Age has given us an exact account of a regular battle, fought between the contending parties in this quarrel; which, though attended with many various turns of fortune, ended at last,

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according

according to him, in an entire defeat of the *Moderns*.

One cannot help observing however, that all the advantage, accruing to the victors from their conquest, seems to have been only a little empty praise, paid them in paper currency from fame's unsubstantial treasury.

It is true some few of the hardy veterans have been pensioned out with their broken limbs and mangled carcases in a college or two; where people go to view them as a kind of fight; and for the sake of hearing tales of old-done deeds, some are even fond of spending the greatest part of their lives with them: in which pleasing intercourse, now and then one, struck with the recollection of their former prowess and present venerable appearance, pays them the honest tribute of his just applause. But notwithstanding this, their cause is visibly declining; as might indeed naturally be expected from their being seated in an enemy's country, which was daily receiving fresh strength, both in men and military conduct. Whilst the provinces, which either by express treaty or tacit consent had seemingly been ceded to them, have been gradually wrested out
of

of their hands; and the spruce Moderns have not only acquired all places of profit and preferment from them, but even vie with them for the post of honor.

The Reader is not to imagine from hence, that I am going to rally these broken and disbanded troops; or that I mean by this preamble to sound again the trumpet for battle. There is war enough in the world already, without introducing it, even metaphorically, into what is properly the peaceable state of letters. All I mean therefore, is merely to take the common liberty of offering to the public a few thoughts, which I have occasionally bestowed on this subject.

If any one should be scrupulous of giving me credit for these sentiments, till he has read what follows; and should require some general account of them beforehand; this would be what I should tell him. — I profess the highest veneration for the ancients; and admire the noble specimens of human wit, which they have left us; but I have many objections to the times and manner in which they wrote*: and though it

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may

* To settle the respective merit of any writer, there is not perhaps a fairer rule in criticism,

may make an essential part in the character of a *scholar* to be acquainted with their writings, yet the way to this acquaintance, which is commonly taken, like many others, which are much used, seems to be neither the nearest nor the best, which might be imagined. I farther own, that I have long been persuaded to think a little knowledge worth a vast deal of learning; and I have for some time entertained a doubt, whether the present method of education established in these kingdoms, is not calculated to promote the last, rather than the first

cism, than to consider the times and circumstances, the advantages and disadvantages under which he wrote. But then how fair a rule forever this may be in settling an Author's merit, it should scarce be any at all in determining a reader's choice as to what particular books may deserve the greatest share of his attention: for, all due allowances being made, a very bad writer by this means may appear to have more merit than a good one; yet what reason could that be, why people should read the works of the former, rather than those of the latter? The only proper question in this case undoubtedly must be, from whom they are likely to gain the most information!

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first of these attainments. This doubt, I believe, was first suggested to me from my own experience; the result of which therefore (leaving the other opinions in the mean time to shift for themselves) I shall here in the first place submit to the Reader's examination.

It is now some years ago, since with the previous preparation of a Grammar-school, and all the proper enthusiasm which boys usually bring with them from thence, I began to study the CLASSICS *. In these only now and then extracting a striking example or a shining sentence, as I went along, I continued to read and read much more, than I could ever give any good account of, or brought in any proper return of advantage—May others meet with better success!—Till at length something suggested to me, that it might not be amiss to

A 3

stop

* A term, which every body perfectly understands, without ever thinking what it means. To prevent mistakes however, what I mean by it, in this place, is every thing and any thing, that is written in *Greek* or *Latin*, provided only it was written long enough ago; which, I think, to put it at the lowest, cannot be reckoned less than fifteen or sixteen centuries.

stop and consider a little what I had already learnt, before I went on any farther.

But here how great was my disappointment! It would amaze you, I dare say, were I to tell you, how little of any thing like knowledge I could recollect! At first I could not help blaming my memory for this; and was glad to think I had provided in some degree a remedy for its defects: I therefore immediately had recourse to my Common-place books, in full hopes that I should meet with something there, which would amply pay me for the trouble I had taken in compiling them. But, alas! beyond a few facts, whose authority was frequently but very doubtful; and a set of fine phrases, whose propriety, in many instances, might have been liable to much controversy; and which at best, when stripped of a little outside gilding, were scarce superior, either in force or clearness, to what ordinary men with less pains and study might easily have uttered; I am almost ashamed to confess, how small a sum the treasure here laid up amounted to!

It is true I had learnt a parcel of words; that is, as Dictionary Writers teach them; so as to be able, with great readiness, to tell
their

their general import, and the common quantity of their syllables. I had besides got together a heap of confused notions about Gods and Heroes, Orators and Poets; whom I seemed to have met with somewhere in the clouds, or another world, whither I had been transported in a kind of dream: and in talking on these subjects with people who delight in such reveries, I could, I flatter myself, have appeared to no great disadvantage. But had I been examined in any matter relative to the state of things, which obtains in this earthly system; had I been asked any question in *morality*, *natural philosophy*, *metaphysics*, or even *Logic*, beyond a few prædicaments and the structure of a Syllogism; I must have appeared as ignorant as an unlettered *Indian*; at least, so far as related to any thing I had acquired from my acquaintance with the Ancients; from whom I had neither learnt any science, any principles of reasoning, or any turn at all for rational inquiry. If therefore I should pretend to have any such at present, I must certainly ascribe their origin to a very different quarter.

I am sensible, how very open I lay myself here; and I can easily guess whose

fault you will say all this was. But, however conscious I may be of many defects at home, I ventured to look a little farther abroad for the cause of my disappointment in this instance, which I was the more encouraged to do, as I thought I could perceive my case to be by no means particular; but that others also, of whom I had much less reason to think amiss, than of myself, were nearly in the same situation: inasmuch, that excepting a certain *curiosa felicitas*, or a kind of happy knack at expressing themselves *after the manner*, and commonly in the *words*, of the *Ancients*, I saw but little to excite one's envy in many that were reckoned eminent masters of Classic lore; from whose example in several instances I was almost led to conclude, that *Greek* and *Latin* scholars, as such, contract an *infantine* turn of mind, which greatly indisposes, if it does not totally unfit them for the pursuit of manly knowledge; what the old Egyptian Priest said of the *Greeks* in general being seemingly applicable in some degree to those, who spend the greatest part of their time in conversing with them, "You *Grecians* are always boys."

How-

However rash or ill-grounded you may think such a conclusion would have been, I flatter myself at least, that you will have less objection to the following more general ones: that continuing to play with toys and rattles must at best give a man, however perfect in stature, only the appearance of an overgrown child: that feeding long on such thin diet as the milk and pap of poetry and eloquence must make the stomach nauseate any stronger food: That an imagination accustomed to be for ever straying through enamelled meads in search of flowers and nosegays, must needs look on the rough and uncouth road of rational inquiry with aversion and disgust: that, in short, attending much to words and slightly to things, will probably teach men to substitute elegant expression in place of argument; to give us fine figures for facts; and to treat us with well-turn'd periods instead of proofs.

Allowing indeed these things to be true, you may still ask "What have they to do with the study of the *Classics*? Now I must desire you to remember, that I am only here recounting to you the steps, by which I was led into my mistake in this matter,
if

if it be one; and far from intending to give you any cause of offence, mean intirely to submit my conduct to your examination; that you may more easily point out the particular turns, where you think I went wrong. Wherefore intreating you to suspend any little occasional impatience that may arise, I will go on to lay before you the farther train of my thoughts on this subject.

It is agreed, I think, on all sides, that human affairs in general have proceeded from very small beginnings. I shall venture to suppose, that by attending to their progress, a certain uniform course might be discovered, which they all pursue; and that consequently by knowing to what particular stage they had in any instance advanced, the state of perfection, in which they then were, might with some probability be guessed at.

There seems to be no good reason for excepting Knowledge out of this rule. On the contrary it must evidently appear, I think, to every one, who considers at all about it, that the sources, from whence it first flowed, were of a very scanty nature; far from any resemblance to that copious stream,

stream, which successive additions afterwards produced; and whose depth, as in other cases, must certainly bear some proportion to its distance from the fountain head. It may perhaps be imagined, that where its waters are more shallow, they will at least be also more clear; but even this seems not to be true in fact; which we may possibly account for in this manner, that having at first a new course to work out for themselves, they necessarily contracted a large mixture of mud and soil, which they could not deposite, till they had flowed some time. By running indeed over rocks and precipices they might make a greater noise here than afterwards; and this may be one principal cause, which has drawn so much attention to them. But if the question should be put, at which part of this flowing stream we ought to stop, and pay the greatest share of our regard; who could answer, that this was the fittest spot?—If indeed imagination only was consulted, it might perhaps send us back among the cataracts for the sake of awful noises and fine prospects; but sober reason would recommend to us rather the contemplation of its enlarged state where, though

though it flows less rapidly, it is on that account better calculated for use and profit.

Some however may perhaps imagine, that by beginning higher up we should be more likely to discover the true and genuine springs of science; and that having amused ourselves there, we should descend with greater ease and pleasure towards the more important parts of it, than we could have possibly enjoyed, had we pursued a contrary course, and gone against the stream: and if these suppositions had any good foundation, something plausible, it must be owned, might be urged in favour of this method of proceeding. But with regard to the last of them, whoever considers the many discouraging labours to be undertaken, the great difficulties to be overcome by those, who would make their way to the first openings of science, ignorant as they must be of the language and manners of those, who should direct them; will rather be apprehensive, lest many should be deterred by this means from pursuing so troublesome a path: and as for those, who happily have got through it, there is surely much danger, lest being tired out, they should be unwilling to encounter with any new hardships,

ships, and so stay where they are; or having their senses soothed with pleasing sights and melting sounds should refuse to quit the enchanting spot.

There is still less to be said in favour of the other supposition: for the head of Nilus, be it in *Nubia*, or more properly perhaps in *Nubibus*, is not more hid, than the sources of science are; especially to those, who are supposed to live near them; who in fact never seem to have thought at all about them. And indeed if by any means they could be discovered, all that could be inferred from thence would be, that the inquiry after them might afford matter of useful curiosity to a few; but to send every one upon this errand, keeping them blindfold as it were, till they have performed it; or at least obliging them to be so intent upon this business, as to allow them neither time nor opportunity to attend to any thing else, seems to be just as wise an undertaking, as it would be in my Lord Mayor to stop up all the pipes and conduits in the City, and allow no one the use of water; till he had first travelled to the *New River* head, and diligently traced out every principle, by which the Planner of
that

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that useful work had been guided in the execution of it.

I would not be so understood here, as if I was declaiming against the method of teaching science by principles; all I mean is, that we are sent to the wrong place for the discovery of these principles, and that in fact much useful knowledge is to be acquired, even without being acquainted with the steps, by which it was first found out.

Supposing all modern Learning to be nothing more, than what some are fond of saying it is, a mere distillation from that of the ancients; yet if we have by this means got it clear of much foreign matter, which did not properly belong to it; who can think, that it is therefore wrong for any one to use it, who does not go through the same process?

Or, allowing the ancients all the merit, which can well be claimed for them,—that they shewed the utmost sagacity and skill in being able to make such advances, as they did, considering the intricate roads they had to travel through, and the great darkness with which they were surrounded; yet who would therefore choose to grope out his way through the same dark passages,

passages, which they of necessity pursued, with only the faint light of some glimmering star to direct him; when he might walk in broad day-light; through a country well known; and where he might expect to meet with such roads and such direction, as that he need only open his eyes to be almost sure of going right? or if any one should make such a choice; who can imagine, that he would be able to get forward with half the speed, he otherwise might have done?

I am aware indeed, that all this may be set down for nothing more, than mere allusion or illustration; a very shadowy and imperfect sort of argument at best; and which it may appear more faulty in me to use, as I may seem not to entertain the highest opinion of those, who have dealt principally in it; I will therefore endeavour to lay before you something, which may be thought perhaps less exceptionable.

It was hinted above, that science had travelled through certain particular stages, which being known seemed likely to afford some tolerable grounds for guessing at the degree of perfection, to which in any of these periods it had arrived.

If

If there be any doubt about what is meant by the perfection of science, I should think it might always be fairly measured by the degree of insight, which men have gained into nature, both of themselves and other things; by which they will be enabled more effectually to consult for their own happiness, and to make a right use of those means, by which providence intended they should promote it.

And whatever difference there may be between the real existence of things and that apparent one, which they have in our imagination, it is certain, that this last may be either a more or less perfect resemblance of the other, (if one may use such a term) according as the medium, through which the view is taken, is more or less clear; the object placed in a more or less proper light; and the observation made with a greater or less degree of accuracy and precision.

To see then how far the former knowledge of mankind deserves our regard; how likely it may be to help forward our own; or what may be the consequence of attending to it too much; it seems necessary to consider in what manner it was formed.

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But as it would be endless to attempt this in every particular of art, science, age, country, &c. I have endeavoured to sketch out such a general plan of the whole, as will, I hope, be found agreeable both to reason and matter of fact.

That "better is the end of a thing, than the beginning thereof," is a principle laid down by the wise King of Israel; and to which, in a general way, I should think, most men would willingly subscribe. In this respect indeed, the beginning and end of most things are extremely alike;—that they are both equally simple; with only this difference,—that simplicity in the former is the off-spring of necessity; in the latter, of reason and a chastised understanding: in the one case, men do not perceive its beauty or fitness; but submit to it merely because they cannot help it; in the other, it is made the object of their choice and pursuit: at first, it is a mark of ignorance and imperfection; at last, it becomes the sure sign of our having learnt what best suits our circumstances: and the knowing how to apply this to use, in every instance, is a proof of the most consummate improvement.

The same nature, which informs us of our wants, is certainly the truest test, when rightly understood, by which we can know, whether they are properly supplied, or not. A right judgment however, in this point, is not so soon attained, as might be wished; men, in the intermediate stages, between this first and last, being apt to be misled by many false appearances.

If one might paraphrase the Poet a little, his words might perhaps more clearly explain my meaning here, and point out in some degree the natural progress of these things. I would say then, with a slight alteration from him, that

"Nature is (properly) young Philosophy's ladder,

Whereto the Climber (of necessity for some time) turns his face;

But when he once attains the higher rounds,

He then unto the ladder turns his back,

Looks in the clouds, and scorns the base degrees,

By which he did ascend."——

Or, in a still plainer, and more prosaic way I mean, that in the out-setting of any art

art (to begin with that first) men must needs direct their attention to Nature; and form their plans, however imperfectly, from such assistance, as they can derive from her. But this end being once tolerably answered, they presently turn their thoughts another way; begin to grow so proud of their attainments, as to forget from whence they borrowed them; nay even to consider art as something distinct from and independent of Nature; which to vie with and outdo becomes now their absurd ambition. So that beyond a very small space at beginning, it will, I believe, universally be found, that all the middle stages of any art are made up of little more, than false ornament and frippery refinement. The ingenious travel into a kind of fairy land; where, upon certain fanciful principles, they erect most specious palaces, without the least real foundation to support them: which may be admired perhaps for their artful construction, till reason detects the cheat; shews their emptiness; and carries us back to the true source and test of art, that propriety, which is founded in nature; though it never comes fully into sight, till Imagination has had its play, and begins to grow tired

of raising those shadowy phantoms, which are so apt to dance before the mind, and draw it off from serious contemplation.

My meaning may perhaps still be rendered more clear by an instance or two. The first man then, I would suppose, who attempted to put fictitious hair upon the human head, either for ornament or to supply the defects of nature, might probably have an eye towards something like fitting and suiting it to the face and complexion of him, who was to wear it; but afterwards, when the wearing of this adscitious head-dress was become a general custom; and the making of it was grown into a trade, craft, or (as its professors might rather, and more properly perhaps, choose to have it stiled) a *Myllery*; what was the consequence? I would appeal to experience, whether this primary intention was at all regarded; or rather, whether the whole and sole aim of every subsequent performer in this art; all that every master has endeavoured to teach his starveling 'prentice, has not simply been to make a wig of this or that particular denomination, of the size of some certain block in his shop, with as little regard to the ducts and features

features of his customer's face, as his neighbour the Hatter manifests; whose goods (though there is much less objection to his practice) are all uniformly black and circular, be the complexion of the wearer brown or fair, his head ever so oblong or oblate, round or elliptical. And I beg leave to refer the unsatisfied, for a farther illustration of this truth to a serious consideration of all the *Feather-tops, Ties, Majors, Brigadiers, Bobs, or Full-bottoms*, which have at any time graced the heads of our ancestors; or which still continue, though somewhat more naturally modified perhaps, to convey that appearance of *wisdom, gravity, and profound respect* round the presence of our modern Learned in the several faculties of **LAW, PHYSIC, and DIVINITY!** It almost makes one smile to think, that the first seeming return towards nature in this instance, should be sticking such an awkward appendix, as a *pig-tail*, on the sublime head of sovereign man. Such however, matter of fact obliges us to own, is the course, which art pursues.

Least this instance should appear too light or insufficient to prove the point, for which it was produced, I have prepared another,

drawn from *Sculpture*, of a more serious cast, to second it. Here then again it is certain, that the original Artist must needs have drawn his first rude sketch of imitation from the pattern of some living object; which, for that purpose, he must have attentively viewed and considered. But when statuary, after repeated trials, is become an art, established upon certain principles; who will say, that this same necessity still continues? A collection of models, diagrams, and rules of proportion, are found out to supply its place; and so little will nature now be thought worthy of regarding, that a statue made at such a period will be likely to resemble almost any thing, rather than a man, consisting of flesh and sinews. It is not, till men have got a little beyond this pride of art, and begin to look back again to the true standard of perfection; that we can expect to see the marble put on that fleshy softness, those swelling muscles, those rising veins, and that breathing life, which *Roubilliac's* hand could give.

It may however be worth our notice here, that in an art, where the objects of imitation, as in statuary, lie open to observation, men may much sooner arrive at excellence,
than

than in others, where the measures of perfection are more obscure and remote; especially if any particular Circumstances demand an uncommon exertion of their abilities: * so that there is no need to enter
into

* This rule if attended to will solve many extraordinary appearances in the former state of arts. It is in particular most happily applied to the case of eloquence in the Dialogue on that subject, published among Tacitus's works. Some of the thoughts here are so strikingly sensible, that I cannot help quoting a specimen or two of them. "Magna eloquentia, sicut flamma, materia alitur, et motibus excitatur, et urendo clarescit. Eadem ratio in nostrâ quoque civitate antiquorum eloquentiam provexit. Nam etsi horum temporum oratores ea consecuti sunt, quæ compositâ et quietâ et beatâ Rep. tribui fas erat; tamen istâ *perturbatione* ac *licentiâ* plura sibi assequi videbantur: cum, mixtis omnibus et moderatore uno carentibus, tantum quisque orator saperet, quantum *erranti* populo persuaderi poterat. Hinc leges assiduæ, popolare nomen; hinc conciones magistratuum pæne pernoctantium in rostris; hinc accusationes potentium reorum, et assignatæ etiam domibus inimiciæ; hinc procerum factiones, et assidua senatus adversus plebem certamina: quæ sin-

into a dispute about the different merits of ancients and, moderns in this instance ; which however is perhaps the only good reason, why we should decline it.

In

gula etsi distrahebant Remp. exercebant tamen illorum temporum eloquentiam, et magnis cumulare præmiis videbantur. Quia quanto quisque dicendo plus poterat, tanto facilius honores assequebatur; tanto magis in ipsis honoribus collegas suos anteibat, tanto plus apud principes gratiæ, plus autoritatis apud patres, plus notitiæ ac nominis apud plebem probabant.— Ita ad summa eloquentiæ præmia, magna etiam *necessitas* accedebat, et *commoda*. — His accedebat splendor rerum et magnitudo causarum. Nam multum interest utrumne de furto, aut formulâ et interdicto dicendum habeas, an de ambitu comitorum, expilatis sociis, et civibus trucidatis. Quæ mala sicut non accidere melius est, isque *optimus* civitatis *status* habendus est, quo nihil tale patimur : ita cum acciderent ingentem eloquentiæ materiam subministrabant. Crescit enim cum amplitudine rerum vis ingenii; nec quisquam claram et illustrem orationem efficere potest, nisi qui causam parem invenit. Non opinor Demosthenem orationes illustrent, quas adversus tutores suos composuit : nec Ciceronem, magnum oratorem P. Quintius
defensus

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In like manner might one instance in *Dancing, Playing*, and indeed in almost every other art whatever; as it will, I am persuaded, universally be found, that they all turn their back upon nature, when once they have got one small remove from her. It is, for example, the business of the *Dancing Master* to teach a set of motions, which may give grace and ease to the human figure: but how much will he be disappointed, who shall expect to see any thing like this amongst the ordinary teachers of this art? How necessarily must he, who would reap any benefit from their instructions, correct by his own judgment the awkward and stiff positions, which they will teach him?

The

defensus aut Licinius Archias faciunt: Catilina et Milo, et Verres, et Antonius, hanc illi famam circumdederunt.—Quis ignorat utilius ac melius esse frui pace, quam bello vexari? plures tamen bonos præliatores bella quam pax ferunt. — *Sed est magna ista et notabilis eloquentia alumna licentiæ, quam stulti libertatem vocabant, comes seditionum, effrenati populi incitamentum, sine obsequio, sine servitute, contumax, temeraria, arrogans, quæ in bene constitutis civitatibus non oritur.*” Happy, happy England!

The end of *Playing* (if we take *Shakespeare's* account of it, and we shall hardly find a better) "both at first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirrour up to nature; to shew virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now this, *he observes*, being either overdone, or come tardy of, though it may take the unskilful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve:" and therefore he enjoins this special observance, "not to o'erstep the modesty of nature," a rule equally applicable both to the matter and manner of *Playing*. To leave then all passionate lovers of the *Classics* undisturbed in their profound admiration of *Thespis*, his cart, wine lees, and other contrivances, together with all the propriety of after improvements in the Grecian stage, such as the sock, buskin, mask, pipe, choral song, dance, see-saw soliloquies, and long speeches; I would just take the liberty of asking, which of nature's walks we must pursue, in order to find out the birth-place of our old MYSTERIES and MORALITIES, *Shews* and *Pageants*! If these can be said to hold any mirrour up, is it not such a one, as turns things

things upside down; or at least, represents them not according to the *modesty of nature*, but according to the utmost extravagance of imagination? As to the manner of playing, to leave both Greeks and Romans again out of the question, "there be players," says the same able observer, "that I have seen play; and heard others praise, and that highly, (not to speak it, prophanely) that neither having the accent of Christian, gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellow'd, that I have thought some of Nature's journeymen had made them, and not made them well; they imitated humanity so abominably." Now where must we look for these same *perriwig-pated fellows*, as he elsewhere calls them, *who tear a passion to tatters, to very rags*? You cannot miss of them among those, who entertain the Gentlemen and Ladies of country market towns with a CONCERT of MUSIC (consisting commonly of one violin) giving *gratis*, between the Acts, a most merry Tragedy, or most woeful Comedy. If you seek for them in more regular Theatres, it must be among the lower class of Actors there; who, in one sense, are certainly placed near enough
to

to nature; but, having set up for Artists, they seemingly take shame at being so near her; and therefore endeavour by every possible method to leave her as far out of sight, as they can. And it is only by the judicious actor of the highest cast, that we can possibly expect to see her at all regarded.

From such instances as these, it may appear at least probable, I think, that the natural progress of art, after it has borrowed a few principles of imitation from nature (which however it soon forgets and leaves quite out of sight) is to travel to as great a distance as it can, from its first outsetting; and to render things as complex and intricate, as possible; which improved reason alone will be able to reduce to any tolerable degree of simplicity or propriety. *

It may be imagined perhaps, that however true this may be of art, in which people of inferior understanding are principally

* I know not, whether one need make any distinction between the *imitative* arts and those, which are not so strictly such, as perhaps at bottom they all depend upon the same or similar principles; if however any such distinction be thought necessary, it is plain the first sort are those intended here.

pally concerned, it cannot fairly be extended to science; as this is peculiarly the business of enlightened minds. A small degree of attention however will, I dare say, convince you, that the same principle holds as true of science, as it does of art. Inasmuch, that any one, I should not doubt, might as soon gain a knowledge of the most abstruse parts of *Algebra* or *Fluxions*, under the direction of an able mathematician, as he could learn the plain and simple RULE OF THREE from a country writing-master; whose absurd ambition it would be to set off this poor pittance of science with a hundred and fifty appendages, merely contrived for shew and parade.

In fact, some of the early philosophers, like the first artists, did probably direct their view to nature: But at what did *Plato* or *Aristotle* look? — The one at the fleeting shadows of his own mind*; the other at a bead-roll of categories! — When the art of reasoning had once got possession

* And that he might indulge this inward contemplation more freely, he seems purposely to have run into a wood; where the thickness of the shade, and surrounding trees must necessarily prevent his seeing far around him.

tion of men's heads, every thing gave way to it; and it was seemingly thought a derogation from it's worth, to be at all beholden to any assistance, that should be derived from facts or experiments. They therefore, who in their searches had probably been guided by such lights as nature afforded them, would soon be superseded and despised, when put in comparison with those, who were themselves to be the great lights of learning and of science.

It would undoubtedly be one of the most entertaining, if not one of the most improving parts of human knowledge, to read the works of those, who made the first discoveries in science; and to trace the various steps, by which at length they arrived at their wish'd-for conclusion. But unfortunately it happens, that the beginnings of human knowledge (if they were not originally impressed upon the mind) were most of them laid in very remote and ignorant times; when men were probably guided more by chance, than by any fixt or regular deductions: so that we might as well expect an account from children of the means, by which they came at their first notions, as from the early institutors of any science.—To as
little

little purpose shall we expect this satisfaction from those, who succeed next in order. The means of conveying knowledge from one to another must, at such a time, be as imperfect, at least, as knowledge itself is. If therefore the first discoverers were able in any manner to communicate the result of their experience, it would be all that could be expected of them.—Neither can we think, that they, who were benefited by this instruction, would be very curious about the means, to which they owed it. Satisfied with its use, we must suppose, the principal thing they would attend to, would be the turning it to as much advantage, as they could.—In farther process of time, men, sensible of the advantage they derived from the knowledge that had been bequeathed them, might be disposed to make it as extensive as possible: the means of doing this would then engross their chief care: this once found out, it would be their pride, to display the attainment they had made: and from hence, for some time at least, we may expect to find them more attentive, as it is usual in other cases, to the means than to the end.—Here an age of words and of writings would commence: in which it would

would be the study of the lettered sages to set off the science, they were possessed of, with every variety of ornament, they could devise. The tree of knowledge, would, instead of fruit, be hung round with garlands and chaplets; would be overspread with every whim of fancy and quaint conceit; through whose thick foliage it would be almost impossible to discern any thing of the body or the branches: all that could be seen, would be merely leaves and flowers. —What then was next to be done? some attempts perhaps would be made to reduce this luxuriancy of ornament within more moderate bounds; and by the pruning and lopping used for this purpose, a little light might be let in, and a view obtained of something more substantial. But certainly the last search, that would be undertaken, would be to descend to the root, and trace out those hidden principles of vegetation, on which the strength and health of his plant intirely depended.

However hypothetical this may appear, we shall find it is just the process, which we all go through, if we attend only to the steps we make, in our advancement from infancy to manhood.—We get at first, we scarce
know

on the Study of the Classics, &c. 35

know how, some early notices—we make use of these.—We are afterwards taught by our masters certain rules—we endeavour to apply these.—We are next required to express our sentiments upon some *Theme* or other:—in how very plain and simple a manner is this at first done?—till by degrees, the grown-up boy plentifully throws out all the bloom and flowers of verse and declamation!—There is not a being upon earth so fond of ornament, not even a girl at a toilette, as a boy at the head of a grammar-school, after he has just attained a little knowledge of language. He may afterwards, perhaps, as his judgment grows more mature, shake off a part of this exuberance: but it rarely happens, before we arrive at manhood, that we are philosophers enough to trouble our heads about the principles of science.

As this seems to be the course of learning both in the world at large, and also in individuals; so will it appear, I make no doubt, to go through a similar progress in all the separate states and kingdoms, that either are or ever were in the world. As the polished Greeks and Romans had once their days of barbarism and false taste; so may

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we,

we, as well as they, boast an age of *fine writing*.

In short, the whole of this reasoning is only a fuller exemplification of this very simple process, which I think must be allowed as true, as it is universal; —that men see things with their outward senses first, with their imagination next; and last of all with their understanding; — just as they consist of three different natures, the vegetable, animal, and rational; which they not only have all at once, but seem to acquire them at different times. The chief difficulty is to ascertain the precise limits, within which these separate faculties are either solely exerted, or at least enjoy a considerable ascendancy. In individuals indeed this might seemingly be settled with a sufficient degree of precision. The main doubt is, how far the world at large may be compared to individuals. Thus much however will certainly be allowed by every one, —that knowledge either in the first or second stage of this process cannot be of so high a value, as in the last; and that even in mix'd cases it must be always so much the more respectable, in proportion as the last ingredient predominates.

So

So that, to bring this home to ourselves; if the days of *fine writing* be over with us, there will not be much reason to lament—place them under one of our *famous Queens*, or in *Charles the second's* reign, it will not be a matter of much import: for an age of *fine writing*, and of *just reasoning* are certainly if not two opposite, at least two extremely different things*. It would be difficult, I suppose, to produce from all antiquity two Writers, who should equal *Tacitus* and *Lucian* in point of good sense; though it is certain, the first did not write in the *Augustan* age, nor the last in *Attic* Greek. And I should desire no greater proof of the good sense of this nation at present, than it's giving birth to such a Society as that “for the Encouragement of Arts,
C 2 Manus-

* I do not mean, that therefore they are incompatible—Books of the strictest reasoning may be well or ill written, as well as others—but I annex a farther idea to the terms *fine writing*, and might therefore more properly call it perhaps *ornamental writing*; which, in point of use or worth, is pretty much like *ornamental china*; the figures in both having nearly the same propriety, and bearing commonly an equal resemblance to nature and truth.

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Manufactures and Commerce." People are welcome, if they please, to produce the instance of the ROYAL SOCIETY against me here, in favour of a former period in our history; they can hardly, I believe, advance a better argument: I should not, however, be at all afraid of resting my cause (so far as concerns our own country) on a fair comparison between these two different institutions.

In an age of ornament, the aim of every one will be, rather to exhibit the little he knows with shew and ostentation, than to examine into the principles, on which it is founded. For this purpose the grand object of his attention will be language. The men of learning, at such a time, will be, strictly speaking, men of letters; instead of laying in a stock of useful knowledge, they will fill the storehouses of science with nothing but idioms and phrases; and in working upon these flimsy materials, will the chief ingenuity of these artists be shewn—words will be derived from words; and books will be made from books—Men will write upon Homer and Aristotle; but they will not write, nor think, upon nature. It is here then, that we may expect to be entertained

tertain'd with every trick, which can be played with words—We shall see them cut and moulded into a thousand different shapes, exhibiting to our view a hatchet or a hand-saw, an egg, or a pyramid; and this not by any intrinsic meaning, but in plain outward form; as if people thought this was the only way, in which a combination of letters could possibly represent a material object!

In fact, whatever reference to real existence the first inventors of letters or characters might have, and whatever resemblance to natural objects the symbols they devised, might bear, so as to be an easy means of bringing the appearance of things to our view, instead of things themselves; this in time gradually wears off, and as language is refined, words cease to be regarded as the representatives of things; and are so far from carrying the mind on to any farther contemplation, that they rather invite it to stop at them alone; forming, as it were, a specious kind of skreen between us and nature; which we must either throw down, or turn our eyes some other way, if we would obtain a true view of things. And the more exquisite the painting on this

skreen appears, the more it will attract our regard, and the less likely shall we be to divorce ourselves from it to look on the rougher and less polish'd face of nature. They too, whose business it is to beautify this splendid piece of patch-work; to dispose their gaudy *purple colouring*, in the most striking point of view; must be so intirely taken up with this employment, that it is not to be supposed, they can have much opportunity, if they had inclination, to bestow their attention on more useful purposes.

I have often amused myself with considering the wonderful analogy, which I am confident might be discovered to obtain in these matters; so that the same age, which gives into ornament in dress and architecture; which tortures nature into quaint shapes in their gardens; should uniformly be found to play the same pranks with their food, both of body and mind: and I have not the least doubt with myself, but that *sylogisms* and mince-pies, *prædicaments* and solomon-gundy, forced meat and *school-divinity* would appear, on due inquiry, to be exactly coeval.

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on the Study of the Classics, &c. 41

I am not, I own, Antiquarian enough to prove this in every instance ; but when I read, as I do in *Pliny*, “ that the first man, who found out the art of clipping or shearing (*tondendi*) trees and groves, was one *Cn. Matius R.* a friend of the Emperor *Augustus* ; ”—I cannot help forming to myself an idea of an Augustan age, in which every thing should appear extremely terse and neat, though at the same time extremely contrary to nature. *

Per-

* However trivial such a rule of judging may seem to others, it appears so good a one to me, that I am persuaded a man of any sagacity, on being let into a garden, might, from the disposition of things there, form no incompetent notion of the furniture within, not only of the parlour and study, but also that of the master's mind, provided that these matters were conducted by his direction ; and it will hold good, I believe, from the plain potatoe ground of the poor peasant, to the spacious walks and avenues of my Lord Lieutenant. A friend of mine (who, I must own, is rather of a whimsical turn) may perhaps be thought to have carried this matter a little too far, when he made the following remark ; which however, as it may serve to explain my mean-

Perhaps the Reader may be farther satisfied of the truth of this whole matter; that is, both in what situation of things an age of ornament is most likely to take place; what its productions will probably be; and how far such an analogy, as I have just men-

ing, I shall take the liberty of laying before the reader. "You know, says he, I made a visit lately to one of our famous Universities: where, when they shewed me their gardens, filled on every side with formal yews, cut into a thousand fantastic shapes, of *doors, windows, pannels, &c.* I could scarce help telling them, I could perceive a prædicament peeping out from every quaint incision the shears had made; nay I even thought I could descry the gloomy spirits of those, who had formerly proscribed *Locke* and his new-fangled opinions, lurking below, As I could not learn that any thing was going on at that time in their schools, I had no opportunity of comparing these surmises with matter of fact in this respect: but the chains, with which the poor books in their libraries were loaded, as seeming emblems of some intellectual fetters and restraints, made me suspect I was not far mistaken: and I was not at all surprised to hear in confirmation of the whole, that they have there annual speeches in praise of *Aristotle.*"

mentioned, is consistent with matter of fact; if he will only bestow a reflexion or two on what is daily passing around him.

However different the circumstances of mankind in general are from what they formerly were, there are yet some parts of the species, which seem to be in a state very near a-kin to what was once the more common lot of all. And even in improved states, looking from the top to the bottom, we shall perceive many different stages, which may enable us to form very probable conjectures about those others, which men already have passed through. I would ask any one then, who takes a view of our own times and country, what he finds, from the plain man unspoiled by art to the man of sense who has got beyond it, all the intermediate space filled with? Is it not chiefly composed of a set of finical made-up animals, so fond of the little attainments they are masters of, as to despise all natural simplicity? The different parts of the dress they wear, must be of as many different colours, as the rain-bow; the liquor they drink, must consist of fifty various ingredients; their beef must be *alamode*, and their pork *barbecued*. If they turn their thoughts

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thoughts to Learning, Poetry, History, and Oratory will certainly be the principal branches of their study, and of these the most unworthy and unnatural sorts; *Rebus's Acrostics*, or a *Song* will serve for Poetry, or if they attempt any thing higher, it will infallibly be such as is of the most turgid and inflated kind. Their oratory will be that of the Tabernacle; and their history borrowed from the circulating Library *

Neither will he judge right, who imagines these whims are the growth of modern times. Very far back, if we would reach their origin, must we trace the deviations from simplicity. All the unnatural kinds of food, dress, and literature, are the genuine produce of an age, when the most improved part of mankind were in a state

* It is a rule, which, I believe, will be found universally true, that the weaker men's minds are, the fonder they will be of every thing, that is strange, romantic, and extravagant—and as all early writings, especially such as are of the historical kind, abound in these qualities, we shall not perhaps judge far amiss if we suppose, this may have been one of the principal causes, which have recommended them to so much notice and admiration.

state resembling that, which they, who are so fond of these things, are in at present. Ear-rings, and all other rings and trinkets whatever, we know are the passion of barbarians. And though one would not call all those barbarians, who wear such ornaments at present; because the prevalence of custom has probably laid them under a kind of necessity of submitting to its dictates in this instance; yet who are they, we may ask, that principally give into this practice? is it not what is usually reckoned the weaker sex; or such of the other, as bear the greatest resemblance to that? and even among these, do we not see the greatest part of such toys stuck upon what is deemed the least worthy hand, and upon the smallest finger there?—what should we think of him, who should now-a-days wear of choice a thumb-ring?

There was a time, when the weakness of men was such, that every thing was to be transacted by tokens, symbols, and pledges. What is the Calamet and Wampum among the Indians at this day, but a proof, that they are now in a state, in which all mankind once were?

If

If Forms and Ceremonies were to be invented now, can it be thought we should have such a number of them, as the awkward imaginations of our ancestors have clogged us with? Every one, who can see, can comprehend external forms; they are therefore properly calculated to impress rude minds: whereas to those, who can penetrate a little beyond the surface, they will seem but empty baubles.—A Coronation might heretofore be a necessary means of securing to the Prince the allegiance of a rude and ignorant People; who, without the anointing of oil, would perhaps scarce have been persuaded to regard him, as a King. But would it be so now? so far from it, every body must see, that such a ceremony now, at least, in its full extent, is only kept up in compliance with old forms and customs; and is indeed looked upon as little else than a higher and more sumptuous kind of public show or entertainment.

The case is just the same with regard to the world of letters—Much ornament in writing is a proof both of the ignorance of him, who writes; and of them, for whom it is written. It may always be seen, that
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on the Study of the Classics, &c. 47

the most trifling both of animals and things, are the most gayly dress'd, and make the greatest noise. Weak appetites too require high sauces, and to have the dishes, that are prepared for their use, elegantly garnish'd. *Children* will hardly eat their *bread and butter*, unless they have it *diced and sugared*.—Hence we may see a reason for the *gilded Primer* at present; and for the *emblazoning*, that was used in former ages.

The subjects too, on which men chiefly write in early times, are more capable of embellishments, than the sober disquisitions of philosophers.—Love of Country, Heroic Virtue, Deeds of Ancestors, &c. are as much the necessary topics of such times, as they are the peculiar provinces of Declamation *. Hence Poetry too has always been

* It is no wonder therefore, if they, who declaim upon such topics at present have considerably the advantage (at least with the generality of hearers) over others, who talk more soberly about them. And yet what is the finest declamation more, than a certain piece of music, composed in words and letters instead of notes or crotchets?—Which, though it be more properly of the vocal kind, might,
I make

been the most early species of writing discoverable in any age or country: and is indeed the best adapted to such rude circumstances, as then obtain—The Beasts, of whatever kind they

I make no doubt, be played with very good effect even upon an instrument!—It is astonishing indeed to reflect upon the power of sounds over man's heart! how prodigiously will a little hallooing (it does not much signify what it is about) exhilarate and raise the human breast; to what a depth will a little grunting and groaning depress and sink it!—We may read of battles lost and won by the sole efficacy of a little extraordinary noise; and *Machiavel* tells us of a city's being lost, after it was taken, by the single word BACK, imprudently uttered by those, who entered first, and were a little too closely pressed by those behind; who hearing this word, understood it a signal for flight; and fairly took to their heels, chased by nothing but this simple sound!—It was with the utmost prudence therefore, that the wise ancients always "shouted for the battle." And how sensibly has this nation lately felt the good effects of a little invigorating noise! What bubbles have we seen blown up to the highest pinnacle of Fame's temple, by the mere breath of popular applause; till by their own emptiness they vanished into nothing!

they were, that danced after Orpheus's lyre*, would never have listened to a calm lecture in philosophy. History † and Oratory seem to be two younger branches of the same family:

* Perhaps however, if we had any genuine remains of this most ancient poet to recur to, it might have appeared, that the true reason (as there is commonly some reality at the bottom of all fictions) why he was said to have drawn trees, stones, and wild beasts after him, had it's rise from his describing these natural objects, (having nothing but nature for his guide) in such strong and genuine colors, as seemed to bring the things themselves to view.

† By History here I do not mean such relations, as lay open to the mind a philosophic view either of men or kingdoms, but merely the story-telling kind. The Reader, I hope, will easily comprehend the distinction; and cannot but know, which of the two preceded in point of time; and where to look both for the one sort and the other. History indeed at first seems to have been as much under the influence of the muse, as poetry was, if we may judge from Herodotus; who however by no means appears to have wrote in a very early or barbarous state of mankind.

mily: and Dialogue-writing * a still later descendent from the same stock.—What good does it do one's heart, to hear *Phila- retes* and *Crito*, before they address themselves to their important disquisitions, flourish out into an elegant præludio; singing in the sweetest sounds the praises of the morning, or the enchanting beauty of those scenes; the hanging woods, painted meads, and purling streams; where they take their philosophic walks? whilst the winged choristers above are sure to play a symphony, in order to shew the pleasing part they bear in such high converse! †

It

* I beg *Monf. Dupin's* pardon for any thing that may appear disrespectful in this article—When I wrote it, I had not met with his unanswerable argument in favor of *Dialogue Writing*. “How can that method, says he, be found fault with, which was used by *Plato*, *Cicero*, *Lucian*, and even some of our best historical writers!” Pref. to *Church Hist.* 4 Vols. in *Quest. and Ans.* However I thought it but right to quote it here, that the Reader might see what was said on the other side.

† Harsh as it may sound to more delicate ears; I scarce ever hear the terms, *Elegant Writer*,

that in such an age those books will be most read, and consequently most copied, which are reckoned to be the best written, without much other recommendation.

If we trace this matter a little farther, we shall find that an age of fine writing will naturally give birth to a race of Critics and Commentators; whose ingenious employment it will be to cut and slice the other's words into a thousand shreds, subdivisions, and refinements *. And amidst the learned dust by this means raised, it will be almost impossible to get any sight of nature, or of truth—nay it will be well, if one can even see any thing of the original authors †. An age of fine writing too
with

* It must surely therefore be thought proper, in time, even by those, who wish well to it themselves, to cross this slender breed with something of a stronger kind; least otherwise it should dwindle into nothing.

† For my own part, I never can open *Eustathius's* Homer, or *Burmann's* Virgil, and cast my eyes upon that vast pile of words, built up on all sides; but the idea of a large old prison comes into my mind; where the two poor poets, being kept under close confinement, are only just
allowed

with it's subsequent generation of philologists will always produce the greatest number of books: which, on account of the high estimation book-making will at such times

allowed to peep out occasionally, for a little air, through the narrow grate of some ill-shaped window!—Tho' of all the ingenious contrivances to exalt the Critic into a higher station than his Author, I have met with none to please me better than that, for which the world is indebted to the *studious labors* of *N. Bailey*: Who from the merit of translating a few *Latin* notes into *English*, has thought himself authorised to call *Ovid's Metamorphoses* by the superior title of "MINELLIUS ANGLICANUS." To shew however this preference is not given without good reason, the Critic certainly brings to our view many beauties which the Poet never dreamt of. His note upon the first line, which proves he would lose no time, may serve as a specimen—

"In nova fert animus mutatas," &c.—where, upon the last word he has this striking observation —*mutatas*] "By an *Hypallagè*, quoth he; for it means bodies changed into new forms and shapes. And the Poet being about to treat of the transformation of bodies, begins very elegantly with a changed structure of words, that he may, in some measure, shadow out the

times be held in, must come down to after ages with great advantages; and will probably continue long to be regarded as the true sources, from whence all men must draw their learning and opinions: whilst in the mean time, if a sound philosophy has by any means got ground in the world, and taught men to think and write upon juster principles, than were formerly known*; the having of recourse to less perfect assistance,

mutation of things by the type of words!" What a copious stream of taste and erudition is here laid open for the young mind to bathe in, *opera & studio* N. Bailey!

* When or where such an event happened, and what its effects have been, not only in matters, that fall more properly within the province of philosophy, but even on more popular subjects (for this will be the natural consequence of the other) would be too long an inquiry to be entered on at present.—In the mean time, as nobody, who thinks, can doubt of the happy consequences, that have accrued to Learning from introducing *Locke* into Aristotle's place (in a species of science too, in which the antients seem to have the fairest claim for pre-eminence of any other) might it not afford just grounds for supposing, that the same success would be likely to attend a similar change in other instances?

ance, when better might as easily be had, must needs appear extremely strange; and a method of education settled upon such a plan cannot but abound with many glaring faults, and needless imperfections.

Thus far in general, in order to prove the second part of my proposition,—that the middle parts of science, as well as art, will probably be filled with unnatural productions.—The next step, I am sensible, is the most dangerous of any I have hitherto ventured to take; it is however this,—that all, or at least the greatest part, of the admired books of antiquity (especially those, which are most read) were written within such a period as this, that is, when men had turned their backs upon nature to pay the greater court to art;—and consequently are ill-suited to give the mind a just turn either of writing or thinking, being much more likely to draw it off from, than lead it to, a philosophic contemplation of nature: instead of whose wholesome objects, they present us with a parcel of metaphysical cobwebs; in the place of serious disquisition, they substitute a specious, verbose, and florid declamation; treat us with an empty display of terms and distinctions, in-

stead of observation and experiment; and by an artificial arrangement of words and phrases, turn our attention from things to sounds; to contemplate the shell instead of the substance; to consider the pipes, in which knowledge is conveyed, rather than the sources, from whence it springs, or the principles, by which it flows on*.

This may be collected not only from the above external arguments, but also from more sure internal marks: and though it would be endless to attempt examining these with the Reader, through every separate branch of science, and all the various authors, who have written in different times and languages; yet it is to be hoped, if he is tolerably ingenuous, he will not think this

* It is matter therefore of no great admiration to me, that most of our useful and important discoveries had their origin in unlettered and *unclassical* ages; that is, when men had little else to look at but the naked face of nature.

And whenever I see a Critic nibbling at the words, rather than entering into the sense and meaning of an author, I immediately conclude, from whence he had his learning.

this is avoided for want of instances enough to the purpose.

Least however such a doubt should arise ; let us take a slight view of *ancient Poetry*. A more important inquiry might undoubtedly have been selected, and would better have deserved our attention : but as the merit of the old *poets* seems to be more universally and fully acknowledged, than that of either their *moralists*, *metaphysicians*, or *natural philosophers*, I was willing to exemplify in some degree what I had to say, rather amongst them, than amongst the others ; and on the same account I have purposely made choice of such of them, as are, in general, supposed to have arrived at the highest eminence and perfection.

It must be owned that poetry, as it was the first species of writing, is for that reason the most likely to be soonest brought to some degree of perfection : especially as it has the same advantage, which was lately observed of statuary *. A vacant field too must

* In all early attempts of this kind, men are necessarily obliged to pay a principal regard to nature, and therefore their works will always contain something worthy of our notice,—but

must afford full scope for the exercise of imagination; and where all was dark before, the least ray of genius thrown upon any object, must give it a lustre sufficient to excite admiration. The lowest excellence, where there is no higher to overshadow it, must always deserve applause. And when once admiration, or indeed any other human passion, has been taught to look in any particular direction, it cannot so easily alter its regards, as to bestow an equal share of attention, even on more deserving objects: though here it will scarce be put to the trial; for it is with most things, as it is with majesty, *cui major e longinquo reverentia*; whatever is removed to a certain

it cannot be supposed, that their observations will be the most accurate; or if they were, that their execution, when they attempt to represent them to others, will be very exact or perfect; this is only to be expected from practice and experience.—I think I remember to have met with an observation some where, “that the true reason why Homer was reckoned blind, had its rise originally from the bungling performance of some old statuary, who had not been able to express properly the prominence of his eyes.”

certain distance from us has a natural kind of dignity in it, which challenges our respect: whereas the words, idioms, and phrases of our own language, like our cloaths, furniture, and whatever else we are too much used to, contract such a meanness in our estimation; that the same idea, which, when dressed in Greek or Latin, might be admitted into the best company; if reduced to plain English, would hardly be secure from our ridicule and contempt. This is seen and acknowledged by almost every body, in the case of very trite or vulgar expressions; and may, I believe, be extended with equal justice to the language at large.

The admiration which, on these accounts, would naturally follow all early specimens of excellence in foreign languages, has been much increased and strongly secured to the writings of former ages; especially those of the poetical class, by the method of education, which has generally been pursued by the moderns. The very difficulty there is in gaining an acquaintance with the productions of other times and countries, enhances their worth: and when once this acquaintance is made, the
pride

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pride and satisfaction we have, in being able to read what others are ignorant of, will certainly by no means tend to lessen its importance in our estimation. That envy too and admiration (qualities, that we are not apt to discourage, when they flatter our vanity !) with which others look up to us, as having conquered the steep ascent of science, are still less likely to make us think meanly of those attainments, which give us this high pre-eminence and distinction. There is nothing very wonderful besides in people's contracting an attachment to those studies, which they have been used to, and which have been highly recommended to them by those, of whose judgment it was in some sort their duty to think well. Neither can we fairly suppose this attachment will be less to such books, as encourage the natural indolence of the human mind, and are not for ever goading it on to some farther inquiries, by offering to its view extensive prospects of unexplored science ; but rather invite it to a calm acquiescence with their dictates, either by concealing whatever lies beyond them, or by representing it as unattainable by man's weak powers.

There

There is at best too strong a propensity in mankind to rest satisfied with the first information they receive. How many even of those, who are reckoned learned, never trouble themselves to form one opinion of their own; nor ever look at nature or truth in any other dress, but such as some fantastic authors have thrown around them! How many have learnt to repeat, after the poet, "that *Nature* and *Homer* are the same," whose sole idea of nature is derived from the sound of a Greek epithet!—If these men find fault with new opinions, it is not because they have any reason or objection against them, but because they seem to interfere with something that, perhaps, they remember to have met with in a more favourite book; which probably is indebted for all the importance they allow it, solely to its coming first to hand, or to its being more upon a level with their own understanding. It is thus, that whilst opinions are formed upon authority, and not by any act of the judgment, truth itself so frequently comes to have the appearance of paradox.

I do not mean by this, that all first impressions are therefore wrong, and as such
without

without farther reason to be given up. I can even allow that common prejudices are usually founded on some good grounds. For what will be the consequence of such a concession? One may easily suppose that, when an attachment to ancient authors was first taken up, there was good reason for the preference, which was given to them over others of a later date; and yet, at the same time, one may consistently deny that any such reason subsists at present. And however right old opinions in general may be, yet it will not therefore immediately follow, that no new ones should have birth: it might as well be said, since there are many who believe the fact, that because we are not quite so strong as our forefathers were, they ought therefore never to have begotten us, but to have suffered the world to end with their own sturdy race. New generations both of men and opinions, if they be not monstrous productions indeed, have this plea of merit at least to offer in defence of their intrusion, that they serve to do honour to such as went before them, and help to set off their importance the more by that inferiority, which they
are

are almost sure to have in comparison with them.

He must have taken a very short view of things, who can flatter himself that a few general strictures will be thought sufficient to decide a point of so much consequence, as the present inquiry. One cannot but be too well acquainted with the force of a received opinion, to suppose it will be likely to be shaken by a slight or sudden attack. If ever the strong citadel of prejudice is to be subdued, guarded as it is behind a number of entrenchments, which have been the work of ages; it will require the most consummate degree of skill and generalship to conduct the enterprise with any probability of success: not only fair and regular approaches must be carried on against it; but every art and all the chicanery of war must be called in aid to second the attempt: sapping and undermining, feints and false alarms; stratagems of every kind; but above all the cunning and address of insinuating one's self into the enemy's confidence, must, I suspect, make a necessary part in every well-plan'd scheme of this kind—Arts, which if I was master of, I know not whether I could persuade myself to

to use!—As it is however, all I pretend to, is merely to point out some few weak places, which may seem to prove, that this fortress, strong as it may be thought, is not absolutely impregnable.

When one surveys that row of antique busts, which have long securely kept their place in the temple of *Apollo*: and recollects the names of those, whose immortal works laid the foundation of all our literary buildings; who, whilst they lived, were the favorites both of Gods and men, and when they died, were accounted little less than Gods themselves; struck with reverence for their hallowed memory, one is ready to pay all homage to their merits: and perhaps it is not the least effectual way of doing this, to shew the disadvantages, under which they laboured. A long list of these might easily be reckoned up, but at present I shall only select that of language, as an instance.

Considering how much has been said in praise of ancient languages, the reader perhaps would hardly have expected to see this instance produced as one of the disadvantageous circumstances, against which the poets of old had to struggle. But whatever other

other beauties they may boast of, whoever examines them with any accuracy, will find, that all ancient languages are extremely defective in this respect, that their words are only signs of very general and indeterminate ideas *. In *Hebrew* this perhaps

* The most obvious properties of bodies will be all, that can strike a rude imagination; such as—great, small; strong, weak; swift, slow; &c. And the most likely method of representing these to others, before the art of writing is known, will be to delineate some imperfect picture of those objects, in which they are principally observed to exist. For instance, the idea of strength may perhaps not inadequately be conveyed by the figure of a Bull, that of swiftness by a Bird, &c. by which means the signs of all those words, which we call adjectives, must originally be substantives: which kind of painting is not, it must be owned, without its merit; as it necessarily refers our ideas back to their archetypes; and leads us, or rather indeed obliges us to be acquainted with nature. But then such a number of images, as it will be necessary sometimes to use, together with their awkward execution, must needs occasion great confusion in the picture: And the principal figure, by being stuck round or covered over with
its

haps might be extended even to verbs and nouns ; but in *Greek* and *Latin* it is observable chiefly in epithets, or the names of qualities. On this account ancient Poetry, and

its explanatory indexes, will appear little better than a *fool's coat* ; which is perhaps a modern remnant of these ancient symbols. The extent too of such representations must needs be exceedingly confined, and many of the images very far fetched. When men to remedy these defects begin to invent arbitrary marks for their ideas, and form a language ; their writings for some time will be little else, than verbal translations of these ancient symbols (indeed the natural formation of all language, whether with the intervention of external symbols or not, depends nearly upon the same principles: all languages at first, as well as countries, will be filled with bears and wolves, till they begin to be cultivated) of which perhaps Homer's *επεα πτερόεντα*, or *winged words*, and his *Ἀρπυια Ποδορῦνη*, with many other expressions of the like kind, and especially some very harsh and indelicate names, which he makes use of, may be reckoned evident instances. But here the ancient simplicity will soon be lost ; for by coupling arbitrary words and symbols or the translations of symbols together, men will presently form such images as bear no resemblance to nature : a
bird

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and indeed all other ancient writings whatever (if we except only a few trifling distinc-

Exercises

bird and a horse are both natural objects; and when the one is set by the other as an emblem of his swiftness only, the propriety of our ideas may still be preserved—but when once you make a winged horse, which is a very easy piece of creation, there is an end of all nature and resemblance; especially, if to improve the breed, you introduce a *West wind* into the family: and by geniuses of a certain stamp such sort of images are the most likely to be attempted.—The great scarcity too of abstract terms must be another cause of imperfection in ancient poetry; for on this account the same word will be applied to many very different particulars; in some of which applications it must needs excite a very faint idea. Thus *καλός* or *beautiful* may properly be predicated of any thing, that has a bodily form; but who can say it has the same propriety, when it is applied, as it is by Homer, to a voice, a harp, (unless he means only the make or shape of the instrument) and indeed to every thing he has a mind to commend? A great variety of general names extending almost to every observable distinction, by which we can heighten the same figure, without introducing collateral ones, swell the muscles, stretch the nerves, &c. will be the only remedy for these defects.

tions in *Logic*) are and necessarily must be conveyed in very indistinct or indefinite terms: so that the size and shape of any object, or at least its peculiar marks and features must in all such descriptions be set before us in a very vague and confused manner. Their writing, like their painting, at such times is either all of one colour * with only

* In an early state of writing, the *verb*, *noun*, and *adjective*, like men in an early state of society, will not unfrequently be almost all of one family—in two lines of Homer (24th Il.) we have the following string of family connections “*ἐδρηγέοντο δρηγῶν αἰεὶ αἰεὶ δὲν σφοδράων ἐσθλῶν*”; where we see, both fathers and sons are *groaners* and *singers*, and *singers* and *groaners* for several generations. I believe some critics have discovered this to be an instance of strength in a language: and indeed, if any civil discord or commotion should arise among these various clans of powerful words; I can easily conceive, that it might be of great service to individuals, to be able to muster under their banner a longer list of dependents and correlatives, than their competitors; but in any other point of view I am sure it betrays such a poverty and weakness, as all rich and well formed languages are ashamed of: and besides the meanness there is
in

on the Study of the Classics, &c. 69

only some general variations of white and black, light and shade; or the colours and figures, through a want of accuracy, run into each other, and are so blended together, that all distinction of the different parts and bounds is intirely lost.

As in having both the master and man, maid and mistress of the same parentage, that family likeness, which always obtains in such cases, must needs in a great degree destroy all variety and distinction. It is scarce possible to render the above passage literally into English, though an old Translator, that I have met with, has gone very near to do it justice in the following specimen—

“Where on a rich bed they bestow’d the honour’d person; round

Girt it with fingers; that the woe with skilful voices crown’d.

A *woeful* Elegie they *sung*, *wept singing*, and the dames

Sigb’d, as they *sung*: Andromache, the down-right prose-exclaims

Began to all, &c.——

It might be more strictly translated, as follows—“The singers of lamentations lamented in a song full of groans, and groan’d, &c.”

As the copiousness and precision of every language seems to bear a regular proportion to the number and distinctness of their ideas, who speak it, (though there are some who thinking every thing best done at first, look upon a language as spoiled by the introduction of new and more accurate terms) we might perhaps justly ascribe the defect above-mentioned to the contractedness of former knowledge: and this again might be traced still farther back to the confined situation of mankind heretofore; when such an enlightened nation as the *Romans*, scarce knew their nearest neighbours the *Germans*. But without entering minutely into such researches as these, the fact, I think, -must sufficiently appear from almost every epithet both in *Homer* and *Virgil* (as may in part, be seen by any one who will examine the epithets in those extracts occasionally produced in this essay) except perhaps a happy compound or two in the former; and it is to a few attempts to remedy this defect, that *Horace* owes a great share of his poetical fame. The instance of TRANSLATIONS is still a farther, and perhaps a more evident proof of this fact. For how easily would these

bc

be made * from ancient languages into our own, (a few idioms only excepted, in which the peculiar genius of the language is concerned) if we were content with a literal rendering; the chief difficulty in this case being occasioned by our nicer notions requiring something farther, than what is conveyed in these plain and simple terms; by which means the Translator is obliged to throw in a number of ideas, which never were intended in the original! On the contrary how impossible would it be for *Tully* himself, were he to come to life again, with all his skill in Latinity, to translate English literally into his native language!

This necessary imperfection, though it may not be so sensibly felt in the *sublime*, to which it is not perhaps altogether unsuitable, in all the softer species of poetry, where a more delicate penciling is required; where certain minute strokes and touches are the leading characters; must be an essential loss.

E 3

Perhaps

* I mean only so far as regards ideas drawn from natural objects—As for allusions to old customs, &c. they derive their difficulty from another source.

Perhaps an instance, which just now occurs to me, may more fully explain my meaning. It is one, which I am sure will not be thought disadvantageous to ancient poetry: I know not indeed, whether a more favourable one could be selected. In the 11th book of the *Æneid*, where Virgil is describing the funeral obsequies of the young, unhappy *Pallas*; amongst other circumstances, all finely imagined, he throws in that most striking one of the dead warrior's horse; whose part, in this mournful scene, is set before us in the two following beautiful lines

“ Post bellator equus, positus insignibus

Æthon

It lacrymans, guttisque humectat grandibus ora !”

This, if ought ever was, must undoubtedly be reckoned true poetry, and just painting. The poet is not content with barely telling us, that *Æthon* wept, or, as the *Historian* says of *Cæsar's* horses, “ quod ubertim fleret ;” but, with an enumeration of particulars, adds

—— guttisque humectat grandibus ora !

I am

I am far from meaning to insinuate, that there is the least defect in this passage: perhaps any thing more minute might have sunk the dignity of the circumstance. But if the Reader will only just cast an eye upon the weeping stag, as described by *Shakespeare*, he will easily perceive all I aim at—

“ To the which place * a poor sequester'd stag,

That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt,
Did come to languish; and indeed, my Lord,
The wretched animal heav'd forth such groans,

That their discharge did stretch his leathern coat

Almost to bursting; and the big round † tears

Cours'd one another down his innocent nose
In piteous chace.”

What

* The scenery of which is so admirably described in the preceding lines, that if it were contrasted with any similar passage in the ancients, it would equally evince all that is here asserted. *Shakes.* “ As You Like it.”

† Here too one perceives the English language capable of all the expressiveness to be

What I would observe then is, that the very act of weeping, not its effects, is here brought directly to our view by a particularity in the description, of which the *Latin* language is utterly incapable. In respect of what is here expressed, the words *grandes*, *humectat*, and *ora*, in the other instance are only general terms. *Grandes* may be construed *large* or *big*, but not *big round*; which gives the very shape of the drop. *Humectat* is expressive enough of the effects of tears; but the wetting or moistening of the face or cheeks, does not represent the very act of their flowing, as the correspondent sentence in the *English* does; where we see them—"Course one another down his *innocent* nose;" and the *piteous chase* reaches to the very heart of the Reader.

The Greek poet, as might naturally be expected, is still less particular in describing this circumstance, than Virgil; Homer only just calling them *θερμα δακρυα* or *warm* tears, which Achilles's horses shed on the death of Patroclus. But his translator sensible of the greater beauty conveyed in the

English

met with in the Greek compounds, without being liable at the same time to any of that perplexity, which sometimes attends them. •

English image, has not scrupled to borrow it, and insert it as a translation of Homer; though he is so far from acknowledging the obligation, that he quotes, in a note, another passage from Shakespear without mentioning this; and indeed by adding a new circumstance to it, very distantly suggested by Homer, (perhaps to disguise it, and make it appear more his own, or at least a juster rendering) has almost spoiled it; as the reader may perceive by only just casting his eye upon the place.

“ along their face,
The *big round* drops cours'd down with silent pace
Conglobing in the dust.” *Pope's Hom. II.*

The truth of this observation might perhaps be more directly proved from instances in *Latin* versions of *English* poetry; but this would be an invidious method. And indeed it was not immediately for such observations, that I entered upon the subject of ancient poetry. I would endeavour to prove, that it is a characteristic fault in ancient writers not to have shewn a due regard to nature; and it seemed, if any such neglect

neglect should appear in their poetry, so much admired for it's natural simplicity, it would afford fair room for suspecting, that the same might be the case in their other writings, where nature must needs lie farther out of sight, and consequently a want of attention to it could neither be so faulty in itself, nor so liable to detection.

If then the poets of old did really look at nature, with what other view could they do this, than for the sake of laying in materials to dress her up in some strange shape or other? Whence otherwise could they have got their Centaurs, Cyclops, Giants, &c. &c. &c? Whenever they attempt to describe any natural object, what hideous disfiguring do they by this means make of it? I would ask any one who has seen the morning, (or indeed, who has not) what idea of it a *rosy-finger'd* Lady, like *Daphne* sprouting into a laurel, conveys to his imagination? How differently does the person, who draws from nature, paint her beauties?

“ Look what *streaks*

Do lace the *severing* clouds in yonder East !”

every one who understands these words,
must

must acknowledge this to be a true picture, which brings at once the object full to his view. But he, who can see any resemblance at all in the other figure, must, I believe, have borrowed a pair of Aristotle's spectacles—must be one, who, according to the Poet,

“has got him glass eyes.
And, like a scurvy politician*, seems
To see the things he does not.”

I would not have it thought, that I had selected the above instance as any thing particular; it is only one, taken from thousands of the same kind, merely to explain my meaning: which is, to assert in general, that almost all the imagery to be met with in the old poets, especially such as is of the personal kind, in which they chiefly abound, is false painting. Though I am aware, that this is, what the Critics both ancient and modern choose to denominate *easy*, *natural* and *animated* description. And indeed in one sense, it must be owned,
it

* I should have liked to change this word, but I could not recollect one of four syllables, that would stand for Critic.

it is all these. It is *easy*—for nothing can be more *easy*, than to dress any thing up into a person: the first and strongest ideas we have are those of personality: to children every thing is a person; a stick is a horse; and the chair or table, that has accidentally hurt little master's forehead is a naughty man; as we may perceive he thinks it to be, from his cries being immediately hush'd, as soon as nurse has given it a blow or two. It is just the same with the weaker and more ignorant sort of people: It is the common dialect of sailors and the lower mechanics to make every thing, they speak of, *Hes* and *Sbes*. It is from the same principle, that the first ornaments in sculpture and carving are always *heads* and *faces*, however awkwardly they may be executed. And on the same account every object almost, either in nature or art, has a *back*, *feet*, *arms*, &c. ascribed to it by every body.

So *easy* have people found this method of conveying their ideas to be, that not only the old poets, but the geographers and astronomers too have made use of it; who, according as their fancies led them, have portioned out both the earth and the heavens, or at least the different countries and

con-

constellations in them, into various shapes and parts of men and other animals.

The great *easiness* with which all this is transacted, is enough of itself to make it appear *natural*; and it has, we see, a still stronger claim to that epithet from it's being principally used by those, who are placed nearest to what is usually called a state of nature.

The allowing it also to be *animated*, might look like punning.—But with all these allowances, where is the merit or beauty of this kind of painting? What is it expressive of, except the poet's weakness; who not having discernment enough to perceive and describe the peculiarities of nature, throws them into the shape of a person, just giving it a leading feature or two, and the business is done? which is serving us, as they do, who undertaking to describe countries they never saw, and of which therefore they can have no true idea, instead of lakes, rivers, mountains, or towns, present us with the figure of some ill-shaped monster or other, which they fancy belongs to the climate; and with this we must be content.

This practice of monster-making is the less to be wondered at in their poets, as we find
the

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the same made use of even in their *natural history* *; which surely, if any thing else, ought

* Whoever will read *Pliny's* account of MAN, which is no very rare or uncommon species of Being, may meet with as many monsters, seriously and gravely described, as the wildest poet among them can produce. Least you should not have the book by you, I will just extract a specimen or two for your perusal. "Moreover, neare unto those Scythians that inhabit the pole Articke, and not far from that climate, which is under the very rising of the North-east wind, and about that famous cave or hole out of which that wind is said to issue, which place they call Ges-elithron (i. e. the cloister or key of the earth). † The *Arimaspians* by report do dwell, who are known by this mark, for having one eye only in the midst of their forehead: and these maintain war ordinarily about the mettall mines of Gold, especially with Griffons, a kind of wild beasts that flie, and use to fetch gold out of the veins of those mines (as commonly it is received :) which savage beasts (as many authors

† Tacitus as gravely tells us of a place in the north of Germany, where the people can hear the hissing noise of the sun, as he sinks into the waves, and can even discern the shape of the God, and the rays of his head."—What a uniformity of these contracted notions is to be met with in all their writings!

ought only to be a plain account of real existencies.

I say

authors have recorded, and namely *Herodotus* and *Aristeas* the Proconnesian, two writers of greatest name) strive as eagerly to keep and hold those golden mines, as the *Arimaspians* to dis-seize them thereof, and to get the gold from them." " *Isogonus* and *Nymphodorus* do avouch there be in Africke certain houses and families of sorcerers; who if they chance to bleſs, praise, and speak good words, bewitch presently withal; insomuch as sheepe therewith die, trees wither, and infants pine and winder away. *Isogonus* adds furthermore, that such like there be among the *Triballians* and *Illyrians*, who with their very eyesight can witch, yea and kill those whom they look wistly upon any long time, especially if they be angred, and that their eyes bewray their anger: and more subject to this danger be men growne, than children under fourteen years of age, &c." " *Pbilarchus* witnesseeth, that in Pontus also the whole race of the *Tbibians*, and many others besides have the same quality, and doe the like: and knowne they are, saith he, by these marks, in one of their eyes they have two sights, in the other the print or resemblance of a horse. He reports besides of these men, that they will never sinke or drowne in the water, be they charged never
so

I say not, but that it is amusing enough sometimes to take a view of these strange creatures,

so much with weighty and heavy apparel. And *Cicero* a *Romane* writer here among us testifieth, that generally all women that have such double apples in their eies, have a venomous sight; and do hurt therewith." "Not far from *Rome* city, within the territory of *Falisci*, there be some few houses and families called *Hirpiæ*, which at their solemn yearly sacrifice, celebrated by them in honor of *Apollo* upon the mount *Sorecte* walk upon the pile of wood as it is on fire with great jollity, and never a whit are burnt withall." "Some men there be that have certain members and parts of their bodies naturally working strange and miraculous effects, and, in some cases, medicinable. As for example, King *Pyrrbus*, whose great toe of his right foot was good for them that had big, swelled, or indurate spleens, if he did but touch the parties diseased, with that toe. And they say moreover, that when the rest of his body was burnt (after the manner) in the funeral fire, that great toe the fire had no power to consume: so that it was bestowed for the nones in a little case, and hung up in the temple as a holy relique."—"upon a certain mountain named *Milus*, there be men whose feet grow the other way backward, and of either foot they have

creatures, which the poet's friend, the painter, has now and then more fully set before

have eight toes, as *Magasthenes* doth report. Also that there is a kind of people, named *Monosceli*, that have but one leg apiece, but they are most nimble, and hop wondrous swiftly. The same men are also called *Sciopodes*, for that in the hottest season of the summer, they lie along on their back, and defend themselves with their feet against the sun's heate. Againe, beyond these westward some there be without heads standing upon their necks, who carry eies in their shoulders.—In the utmost marches of India, Eastward, about the source and head of the river Ganges, there is a nation called the *Astomes*, for that they have no mouths: they live only by the aire, and smelling to sweet odors, which they draw in at their nostrils: no meat nor drink do they take, only pleasant favors from divers roots, flowers, &c. and those they use to carry about with them, when they take any farre journey, because they would not miss their smelling. In the desarts of Africke ye shall meet oftentimes with Fairies, appearing in the shape of men and women, but they vanish soon away like fantastick delusions.—See how nature is disposed for the nones to devise full wittily in this and such like pastimes to play with mankind, thereby not only to make her-

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fore us. As for instance, FAME with a hundred tongues and as many mouths; the
Circes,

self merry, but to set us a wondring at such strange miracles. And I assure you, thus dayly and hourly in a manner playeth she her part, that to recount every one of her sports by themselves, no man is able with all his wit and memory. Let it suffice therefore to testify and declare her power, that we have set down those prodigious and strange works of hers shown in whole nations."—The Reader will, I dare say, think this abundantly sufficient.—And yet who has not met with many understandings of such a pitch, as to be better pleased with these strange relations, than with any more just or accurate accounts? If we inquire for the rank of these people in life, we shall find, that they are situated pretty near to what is usually called a state of nature; and who yet would uniformly always receive more pleasure from every thing, in proportion as it bore the less resemblance to nature—would be much more highly delighted with the dress, tricks, and distortions of a Jack-pudding, or a Bartholomew-fair Droll, than with the most regular representation of men and manners, that ever was exhibited!

✍ I have chosen purposely to give these extracts from an old Translation; because there is a quaintness in it, that seems to enter thoroughly into the spirit of the Original.

Circes, Sphinxes, Briareuses, Geryons, &c. with the whole list of Ovid's metamorphoses. But when the world is intirely new peopled with such a spurious and supposititious race; when every feature of nature's face is thus distorted and drawn in caricature; and at the same time we are bid to admire the strength and beauty of the pencilling; it becomes too much for any friend to propriety and truth to assent to, or bear with. And yet so fond are some people of every thing that lies beyond the bounds of all propriety or resemblance; that if the old parasite had gone on with his scheme of shaping mount Athos into a statue for Alexander, I make no doubt but we should have had some connoisseurs so complaisant, as to have praised not only the grandeur and magnificence of the design, but the likeness, and strict attention to the natural proportion of the parts!

If indeed, according to the criticism of *Audrey's* lover in the play, "your true poetry is always the most feigning," this method of writing has clearly the advantage of all others.

But unbounded as the limits are; which poets claim for the free range of their ima-

gination, I cannot help suspecting, that unless this fiery courier be reined in with some degree of philosophic propriety, like the sun, under the management of *Phaeton*, it is more likely to throw all nature into confusion, than to enlighten or adorn it.

In strictness imagination seems to be only an inward kind of sense, looking on memory's tablets. And though in describing these to others, the poet may be at liberty to place his favorite objects in a more striking point of view, and give them a higher degree of coloring, than others, which he may choose to throw into a back ground or into shade; yet so long as he pretends to be representing real existencies, he can have no right to paint them otherwise, than as they appear to the outward senses.

There may be some, who, dissatisfied with this world, may like to see a new one of the poet's creating: and even to those, who are not, the raising new scenes of existence may, besides the entertainment, answer many valuable purposes. If the poet therefore wants to indulge his fancy in a free'r display of it's powers, and thinks his abilities equal to the task, let him sail to the regions of *Utopia*, there is room enough there

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there for him to do what he pleases. But to change the appearances of things here, or to fill this world with beings, which we cannot see, is an affront to our senses.

Such a practice might, perhaps, be more excusable in later writers, if they could fairly say, that their predecessors had exhausted this world of all it's beauties, and that therefore they were obliged to form another for their own use. This however is far from being in reality the case: the first adventurers had by no means exhausted nature of her stores; and the latter seem to have acted, as they have done, more in compliance with the example of the others, than for any real occasion.

Amongst the Ancients this extravagance, we may suppose, was owing partly to the rudeness of the writer's fancy; and partly to the gross conceptions of those, for whose amusement his drawings were designed; whose genius, like that of some even in our days, was too elevated to be satisfied with any thing of the ordinary size—their heroes must therefore all be Gods, or giants at least; and as if the beasts of the forest had been too tame to please their wilder imagination, poets were obliged to throw all their hideous

features together, and, by that means, form monsters more agreeable to their barbarous taste.

Or, if one were inclined to give a more poetical solution of the matter, one might perhaps not unjustly say, that it owed its continuance at least, in more refined ages, to men's hunting after nature with a pack of muses, instead of their five senses.

There is no doubt to be made, but that a poet with a parcel of Deities at his heels, to serve in the capacity of dressers and scene-shifters, may work many notable feats; and give us more sublime accounts of things, than a poor unassisted mortal can do. But then here we readers act plainly under great disadvantages. Why should we be at the pains of reading what the poet was not at the pains of writing? It would be well enough indeed, if every one was furnished with a little pocket muse or so, to pull out upon occasion, and let her to read what the other's muse had wrote; which otherwise will in all probability be far too refined for mere human intellects to comprehend! But as this can be the happy lot of only some favor'd few, on whose birth-day these Deities were kind enough to smile, the generality

on the Study of the Classics, &c. 89

lity must ever despair of attaining this high satisfaction. For my own part, I suspect, what I dare say you are perfectly convinced of, that no muse was in good humour enough to dimple her cheek on the day that gave me birth. And therefore whilst a poet deigns to talk with me as a fellow-creature, so long I endeavour to understand him; and when I understand him, if to my mortal capacity he seems to shew himself a nice discerner of nature in any interesting situation, and gives me masterly drawings of her different appearances, I admire and am pleased with him. But if he once gets upon a flying horse, or I see him beginning to soar upon the eagle-wing of his muse into the clouds, well knowing that my dull clay is too heavy for such rapid travelling, I immediately leave him to pursue his airy journey alone, and quietly keep myself where I am.

I am afraid, Gentlemen, to persons of your fine feelings, delicate taste, and exquisite sensibility, all this must appear extremely low and groveling. But I know not, how it is; I never in my life, out of complaisance to a set of rules or terms of art, could affect to be delighted with what I neither

felt, heard, saw, nor understood. This is really the plain truth, despise me, as much as you please, for it.

It is on this account I suppose, that some specimens of *Erse* poetry, lately published, afforded me so much more pleasure, than any thing I ever met with in *Homer*. Here the Poet sees and speaks with human eyes, and a human tongue. He has no tatling gossip of a *Muse* to come in with her idle prate, and tell us a long story of I know not what. Every object he draws, stands out from the canvass, and is, what it pretends to be, a striking representation of nature*. Who can help seeing "The tree,

* How poor a limner is *Homer* in this respect! what are all his "*μυιαων αδιναων εθνεα πολλα*" when compared with this single passage—"The flies of evening are on their feeble wings, and the hum of their course is on the field!"—If it should even be suspected, that the highland bard had borrowed this piece of imagery from the father of poets, how greatly does he improve it by a proper application! instead of using it as a simile for armies, see how he applies it—"He (the ghost of Crugal) comes to the ear of rest, and raises his feeble voice; like the

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tree, that stands alone on the hill?—The tree with scarce a leaf, and the long grass which

the humming of the mountain-bee, or *collected flies of evening*." he has much stronger figures to represent the conflux of armies—"Green Ullin's warriors convened, *like the roar of many streams*."—For a specimen of Homer's landscape-painting take the expedition of his woodmen—

"Πολλα δ' ἀναγῆα, καὶ ἀναγῆα, παρὰ γὰρ τε, δοχμῶν
τ' ἤλθον."

What is this better, than a piece of the old woman's story—"They went and they went, over many a high hill and lowly vale, till they came, &c."?—Perhaps a critic might tell us, that the up-and-down hobbling measure of this line, (which by the way consists of nothing but dactyles) was intended to represent the tediousness of their passage—Just as by the same means sounds, or rapid swiftness are set before us in other places.—

Ἀνῆα δ' ἐπεὶ πεδονδε κυλινδεῖο λαας ΑΝΑΙΔΗΣ-
Τριχθα τε καὶ τετραχθα διαίρουφεν ἐκπρεσε χειρὸς-
&c.

But all such instances at best are nothing more, than the mere trick of verse; and, in a modern, would be reckoned little else, than an artifice

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which whistles in the wind!" But there is something so peculiarly interesting in these poems,

artifice to supply the want of sense by a jingle of sound.

As little of the master does he shew in laying open the workings of the human heart—When *Achilles* is robbed of his Mistress (no uninteresting event!) what are his reflections?—He runs like a great lubberly school-boy, whimpering to his mother, to tell her, how ill Master *Agamemnon* had used him! and she, like a good woman as she was, comes in with this very motherly question,

"Τεινον, τι κλαιεις;"—*Child, what do you cry for?*
&c.

It must be owned however, that his account of *Andromache's* distress for the loss of *Hector* is rather an exception to this; though even here the reader will hardly find a circumstance to strike his imagination with half the force, as the following on the Death of *Cuchullin*. "Thy spouse is left alone in her youth, the son of thy love is alone.—He shall come to *Brigella*, and ask her why she weeps.—He shall lift his eyes to the wall, and see his father's sword.—Whose sword is that? he will say: and the soul of his mother is sad."

As

poems, that it will not suffer one to quote such short, detached instances. The reader must

As to that sublime Nod of his, with which he has shaken the heads of his readers, more than ever *Jupiter* shook the heavens; I must confess, I never yet could see, wherein the majesty consisted of making a person shake his hair about his ears. Call this person the King of Gods and Men; let his head be immortal and his hair ambrosial, the idea must still be the same: and with whatever dignity it might strike the old statuary, I must own it appears to me a mean and degrading circumstance; and so, I suspect, it appeared to the chaster *Latin* Poet, who, in his imitation of this passage, has entirely suppressed this part, retaining only what is really sublime—

“Annuat, & nutu totum tremefecit Olympum.”

If any one doubts of this, let him only compare this imitation with that given us by another poet, and he will certainly soon be satisfied; though *terrificam* is undoubtedly as expressive a term at least as either *Αυτοκρατορας*, or *Αδυνατας* can possibly be.—Hear Ovid then, who has retained this circumstance—

“Ter-

must therefore give me leave to bring to his mind again a passage or two, more at full length;

“Terrificam capitis concussit terque quaterque
Cæsariem; cum qua terram, mare, sidera
movit.”

If this be not thought mean enough of itself, it is but applying to *Minellius* or *N. Bailey*, and we may have it let down as low as heart could wish—

Concussit] “He often moved and shook it; this, *say they*, shews Jupiter to be angry; and the often shaking of his head denotes his indignation.”

Perhaps it may be thought that these instances from *Homer* (I have confined myself to the *Iliad* to avoid disputes) do not tally sufficiently with those from *Ossian* to enable the reader to form a fair comparison between them. That was not indeed the primary intention of producing them; though, were it necessary, I suspect a much stronger reason might be given for this want of similarity. To bring however the two into a closer view, let us contrast their respective descriptions of that noble animal the horse. *Homer* in his 2d Book desires the *Muse* to tell him, who was the best man, and which the best horses, that came to the siege of *Troy*. Upon which she immediately, as thinking per-
haps

length : which however I have scarce used any other art in selecting, than that which is

haps the last question the most important of the two, resolves it first, and declares that Eumelus's two mares were far the best horses the Grecians had—

“Ἴπποι μὲν μέγ' ἀριστοὶ ἔσαν Πηρηϊάδῃ,
 Τὰς Εὐμήλος εἰλαυνε, ποδωπείας, ορνίθας ὥς,
 Οἰριχᾶς, αἰετᾶς, σαφύλη ἐπὶ νύκτον εἰσας·
 Τὰς ἐν Πιερίᾳ θηρὶν ἀργυροδόχοι Ἀπολλων,
 Ἀμφὶ θηλάσας, φοβονίαντος φορεούσας.

Or as Mr. Hobbes has elegantly translated it—

“Eumelus his two horses did surpass
 (Tho' they were females) all the rest for speed,
 Their color, age and stature equal was,
 Sprung in Pieria from Apollo's breed,
 That terror drew about as swift as wind, &c.

In which instance (to pass over the awkward expression of making the mares as *swift of foot*, as birds, which for fear it might not strike the young construer sufficiently in Greek; the Latin translator has retained in it's full beauty, rendering it “*pedibus veloces, tanquam aves*”) I would just take the liberty of observing, that even the chaste Greeks can sometimes condescend to

is practised in taking the *sortes Virgilianæ*, having in a great measure set them down, just

to make use of that barbarous letter S; as the reader may perceive, if he will consult either his eye or his ear: and that he may not think it any thing particular here, I would recommend him to a line just preceding—

Τὸν ἤρχ' Εὐρυπύλος, Εὐαίμονος ἀγλαὸς υἱός

where the beautiful repetition of the final *ο* four times successively will, I hope, atone for an accidental slip of this sort now and then in *English*; especially as this is the language of a *Muse* herself.

Let us now take a view of the steeds, which *Ossian* brings into the field; “the steeds, that like wreaths of mist fly over the streamy vales.” —“Before the right side of the car is seen the snorting horse. The high-maned, broad-breasted, proud, high-leaping, strong steed of the hill, loud and resounding is his hoof; the spreading of his mane above is like that stream of smok on the heath.” On the other side of the car is seen his fellow—“the thin-maned, high-headed, strong-boofed, fleet, bounding son of the hill. The wildness of deer is in their course, the strength of the eagle descending on her prey. Their noise is like the blast of winter on the sides of the

just as the book happened to open: nor shall I pretend to analyse them with any critical exactness, but merely to place them before the observer's eye as so many proofs of what is above asserted.

Who then can look at the following description, and not forget almost, that he is reading words?—so naturally do the real objects themselves rise to our view!—"A rock bends along the coast with all its echoing wood. On the top is the circle of Loda, and the mossy stone of power. A narrow plain spreads beneath, covered with grass and aged trees; which the *midnight winds in their wrath had torn from the shaggy rock*. The blue course of a stream is there; *and the lonely blast of ocean pursues the thistles beard*."

Nor is the skill of this poet less eminent in drawing persons than things—with what a strength the snow-headed Gormal. Within the car is seen the chief; the strong, stormy son of the sword;" &c. Now compared with these high-mettled couriers, Homer's two mares might pass for Venus's doves, or two tame pigeons. I tried to mend them with a better pair from the chariot-race in the 23d Book, but without the least success.

a strength and propriety of colouring is the interview between Erragon and Bosmina painted! "Erragon frowns on the coast, Gloomy is the king among his chiefs! he is like the darkened moon, amidst the meteors of night, &c."

"She came to the host of Erragon, *like a beam of light to a cloud*.—In her right hand shone an arrow of gold: and in her left a sparkling shell, the sign of Morven's peace."

"Erragon brightened in her presence as a rock before the sudden beams of the sun; when they issue from a broken cloud, divided by the roaring wind."

Nay,

* With what an extreme attention to nature are these and such like images drawn? "The wind and the rain are over: calm is the moon of day. The clouds are divided in heaven, *Over the green hills flies the inconstant sun*."—A painter might draw from hence.—But what painting could represent that sudden succession of light and shade, which is conveyed to the mind in the last period?—How different is the use which the Greek and Latin poets make of these great luminaries, who commonly introduce them for little else, than merely to tell us, what time of day it is!

"Sol

Nay, so strongly is his imagination impressed with these natural ideas; that he can almost paint the sounds of music in visible colours † — The song comes with

its

“Sol medium cæli conscenderat igneus orbem.”

“Nox erat et cælo fulgebat Luna sereno.—”

“Tithoni croceum linquens Aurora cubile.” &c.

Though it must be owned, that where he is not blindly following Homer, few poets have paid a greater homage to nature, than Virgil has. And even Homer it must be farther owned has a simile in his 16th Book—Ὡς οὐτ' ἀφ' ὑψηλῆς, &c. very near a-kin to that, which occasioned this note; but then it loses all propriety by the application.

† Compared with these, what faint ideas of music do Homer's descriptions of it convey to our minds!

παρὰ δ' εἰσαν αἰδῶς,
Θρήνων ἐξέχευς, δῖτε γονοεσσαν αἰοῖν
Οἱ μὲν ἀρ' ἐθρήνεον, ἐπὶ δὲ γέναχοντο γυναῖκες. II. 24.

We need not even except the heavenly concerts, vocal and instrumental, which he prepares for his gods and goddesses at their meals—

Δαιτυνῶν, καὶ ἐτι θυμὸς ἐδάμετο δαιτός εἴσης,
Οὐ μὲν φορμιγγὰς περικάλλεος, ἣν ἐχ' Ἀπολλων,
Μούσων δ', αἱ αἰδὼν ἀμειβομένηαι οὔτι καλῇ. II. 1.

its music, to melt and please the soul. It is like the soft mist, that rising from a lake, pours on the silent vale; the green flowers are filled with dew, but the sun returns in his strength, and the mist is gone!—why art thou sad O Armin! &c.”

All his images of that hurting, healing quality of soft sounds, are drawn with such an exquisite degree of sensibility, and are so directly addressed to our common feelings, that callous indeed must the heart be, which can resist them.

“This is no time, replied the bard, to hear the song of joy; when the mighty are to meet in battle, like the strength of the waves of Lego. Why art thou so dark, Slimora! with all thy silent woods? No green star trembles on thy top, no moon beam on thy side. But the meteors of death are there; and the gray watry forms of ghosts. Why art thou dark Slimora, with thy silent woods?”

“He retired, in the sound of his song; Carril accompanied his voice. The music was like the memory of joys that are past, pleasant and mournful to the soul. The ghosts of departed bards heard it from Slimora’s side. Soft sounds spread along the wood,
and

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and the silent valleys of night rejoice.—
So when he sits in the silence of noon, in
the valley of his breeze, the humming
of the mountain bee comes to Ossian's
ear : the gale drowns it often in its course ;
but the pleasant sound returns again.*

And the song of *Ullin* is, perhaps, a
stronger, and more natural instance of the
power of music, than any of those we so
justly admire in *Dryden's* celebrated Ode.

CRIMORA.

" Farewel, ye rocks of Ardven ! ye deer !
and ye streams of the hill !—We shall re-
turn no more." &c.

" And did they return no more ? said
Utha's bursting sigh."—How irresistibly does
this question, accompanied by the *bursting*
sigh, throw back upon the reader every idea
of grief and melancholy, which had seized
the heart of Utha !—" *Ullin* saw the vir-
gin's tear, and took the softly trembling
harp : the song was lovely, but sad ; and
silence was in Carric-thura."

G 2

What

* Perhaps the reader will recollect, that this
is not the first time he has seen this last thought
in an English dress not much unlike the present.

—What a solemnity is there in the following preparation! “Autumn is dark on the mountains; gray mist rests on the hills. The whirlwind is heard on the heath. Dark rolls the river through the narrow plain. A tree stands alone on the hill, and marks the slumbering Connal. *The leaves whirl round with the wind, and strew the graves of the dead.* At times are seen here the ghosts of the deceased, *when the musing hunter alone stalks slowly over the heath.*”

Were ever the ideas of melancholy and distress so strongly embodied into living forms, as they are in the mournful songs of Alpin and of Armin?

ALPIN.

“Who on his staff is this? who is this, whose head is white with age, whose eyes are red with tears, who quakes at every step? * — It is thy father, O Marar! *the father of no son but thee, &c.*

“Rise,

* With such propriety is this image drawn, that it is not in the power of twice twelve monosyllables to lessen its effect. The description closes with this remarkable line. — “When shall

ARMIN.

“ Rise, winds of Autumn, rise ; blow upon the dark heath ! streams of the mountain, roar ! howl, ye tempests, in the top of the oak ! *walk through broken clouds, O moon ! show by intervals thy pale face !* bring to my mind that sad night, when all my children fell ! when Arindal the mighty fell ; when Daura the lovely failed ! ”

“ Alone on the sea beat rock, my daughter was heard to complain. Frequent and loud were her cries ; *nor could her father relieve her.* All night I stood on the shore. I saw her by the faint beam of the moon. All night I heard her cries. Loud was the wind ; and the rain beat hard on the side of the mountain. Before morning appeared, her voice was weak. It died, away, *like the evening breeze among the grass of the rocks.* Spent with grief she expired, &c.”

G 3

I shall

shall it be morn in the grave, to bid the slumberer awake ? ” Which to some may, perhaps, appear to contain in it a strong gleam of more than poetic light. Though however striking it may seem, it certainly arises naturally enough, from the thought, that precedes it.

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I shall quote but one instance more of this kind, and that chiefly on account of the striking *incident* *, which we meet with in it, as in ancient poetry this is rather an uncommon circumstance.

C O L M A.

“ It is night—I am alone, forlorn on the hill of storms. The wind is heard in the mountain. The torrent shrieks down the rock. No hut receives me from the rain; forlorn on the hill of winds.——Cease a little while, O wind! stream be thou silent a while! let my voice be heard over the heath; let my wanderer hear me. Salgar! it is I who call. Here is the tree and the rock. Salgar, my love! I am here. Why delayest thou thy coming?”—

“ But who are these, that lie beyond me on the heath? Are they my love and my brother? speak to me, O my friends! they

* There is another of a similar kind in the song of Shilric—When thinking that Vinvela was alive, he mistakes her ghost for her real substance, and enters into converse with it. Perhaps also we might reckon a third in the *dramatic poem* of *Comala*.

they answer not. My soul is tormented with fears.—*Ab! they are dead, &c.*” *

If we follow this poet a little farther, beyond the precise boundaries of nature, into those regions which fancy claims as her own; yet still shall we see such a cautious observance of propriety, kept up in the wildest flights of imagination, that we must allow even those descriptions to be in some degree *natural*, which he gives us of beings unendued with any cognisable form. The shades of his departed warriors, the ghosts of heroes of other times, when they are seen in the clouds, lean properly upon a *spear of air*.—“*half viewless*. they walk in

G 4

mournful

* I would recommend to those, who think there is a want of art in the versification of these poems, just to consider for a moment this single paragraph—were ever the emotions of *surprise*, *hope*, and *eagerness* expressed in more correspondent measure, than they are in the hurry and precipitate flow of the three first periods; beginning at “*But who are these*,” and ending at “*speak to me, O my friends!*” Or *disappointment*, *fear*, and *dismay* more strongly painted in words, than they are in the short, broken measure of the three last? “*They answer not.*” “*My Soul is tormented, &c.*”

mournful conference together" — And
"the stars dim twinkle through their forms."

For a complete instance of this matter, let us just attend to the interview and conflict between Fingal and the spirit of Loda. "A blast came from the mountain, and bore, on its wings, the spirit of Loda. He came to his place * in his terrors, and he shook his dusky spear.—His eyes appear like flames in his dark face; and his voice is like distant thunder. Fingal advanced with the spear of his strength, and raised his voice on high."

"Son of night, retire: call thy wings and fly! Why dost thou come to my presence with thy *shadowy* arms! Do I fear thy gloomy form, dismal spirit of Loda? Weak is thy *shield of clouds*: feeble is that *meteor*; thy *sword*. The blast rolls them together; and thou thyself dost vanish. Fly from my presence son of night! call thy winds and fly!"

"He lifted high his shadowy spear; and bent forward his terrible height. But the king advancing, drew his sword; the blade of dark-brown *Luno*. The gleaming path
of

* Described above pag. 97.

of the steel winds through the gloomy ghost.
*The form fell shapeless into air, like a column
of smoke, which the staff of the boy disturbs,
as it rises from the half extinguished fur-
nace.*"

"The spirit of Loda shriek'd, as, rolled
into himself, he rose on the wind. Inistore
shook at the sound. The waves heard it
on the deep: they stopped in their course,
with fear." &c.

Was there ever such a regular extrava-
gance of fancy? * Allowance being made
for

* The two following original fancy-fal pic-
tures of *Life*, and its enemy *Death*, might per-
haps be added as instances of the same sort—

"Our youth is like the dream of the hunter on
the hill of heath. He sleeps in the mild beams
of the sun; but he awakes amidst a storm; the
red lightning flies around: and the trees shake
their heads to the wind. He looks back with
joy, on the day of the sun; and the pleasant
dreams of his rest! When shall Ossian's youth
return? &c.—

"Nor long didst thou lift the spear, mildly-
shining beam of youth! *death stands dim behind
thee, like the darkened half of the moon behind its
growing light.*"---Though possibly a critic of a
severer eye might suspect this last image to be of
modern extraction.

for the first supposition, we shall find nothing in all this description, that quarrels in the least with our ideas, or outfaces credibility. Though the hero, transported with excess of daring, draws his sword against this unsubstantial enemy ; yet the poet has taken care to paint the wound he gives it, as free from any mixture of corporiety as the vision itself. We hear nothing of the part where the weapon *entered the skin*, nor of *the quantity of blood*, that flowed from the incision *.

The

* It must be owned however, that even this attention to propriety affords some room for suspecting, that the poet and his heroes were of two extremely different ages and degrees of intelligence (which suspicion by the way, the frequent reference to *the days of other times* by no means abates)—For if *Fingal* had conceived as justly of this *shadowy* being, as the poet seems to have done ; it is not easy to imagine, that he would have mocked either his courage or his sense so much, as to have entered into any formal engagement with it. His ideas must certainly have been of a much grosser class to have led him to such an encounter. The Editor indeed tells us, “ That Ossian *says* nothing here, but what perfectly *agreed* with the notions of

The extreme delicacy and propriety indeed, which are preserved throughout these poems, do as effectually prove, that *Osian's* skill was superior to *Homer's*; as the great simplicity † and attention to nature in them
shew

of the times, concerning ghosts. They thought the souls of the dead *material*, and consequently susceptible of pain." But I should be glad to know, where we are to look for the *materiality* (taking the word in its common acceptation) of this spirit in the above description!

† Upon the whole however, this appears to be rather the *simplicity of perfection*, than of *rudeness*—that sort, which I have above (p. 19) laid down as a mark of the highest improvement. For in all other instances of early writing, whatever occasional breaks of a sublime genius may appear, their lustre is usually obscured, like that of the diamond in the mine, by the dirt and rubbish that surrounds it. But here every thing is highly polished and elegantly set, without one degrading circumstance being intermixt to diminish its splendor.

If this be a translation too; who can say, that the spirit of an original is not amply preserved in it? I should like to see *Homer* translated in the same prosaic manner (that is at least, without the help of rhymes and other additions)

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shew (if they are, what they pretend to be) that they were written in a period of greater antiquity, than the *Iliad*. † — Don't mistake me,

ditions) and the two contrasted together! But indeed there seems to be something more required to make one believe these poems, as they at present appear, to be the productions of the times they are ascribed to, than the vague authority of two or three highland pipers (which suspicion by the way, the frequent reference to *the days of other times* by no means abates) especially since the Editor himself has seemingly injured, in some degree, the cause he endeavours to maintain, though he certainly talks in a very masterly manner, by condescending to argue with us, upon equal terms, about the probability or improbability of their being genuine, when he could have appealed to matter of fact, and have confirmed the point by fair testimony.—Be this however as it may, he has my most hearty thanks, for furnishing me with one of

† *The tricks that Homer plays with language, if we had no other, would furnish a sufficient proof, that men in his time were advanced considerably beyond a state of simplicity. If he even distantly dreamt of half those rules and figures, which his Critics have since fathered upon him, the case would be beyond all doubt. And yet it would not be very difficult to shew that he has offended against almost every rule his Critics have drawn from him.*

on the Study of the Classics, &c. III

me, sir; I mean in an earlier state of civilization; before art had reached that height,
to

of the highest entertainments, in the poetical way, which I ever met with in my whole life. And if to make people relish this delicious repast, it was necessary to persuade them, that it was prepared some hundred years ago; what can they so properly blame for this, as their own absurd humor, which requires thus to be cheated into pleasure?

Before I quit this shining instance of British genius, in whatever age it was first produced, I cannot help observing how effectually it seems to decide that long disputed question, whether verse (as it is usually understood) be essential to poetry or not. The truth is, that poetry was as certainly prior to the art of versifying, as reason was to the making of syllogisms: and, in strictness, the one perhaps contributes just as much force and propriety to it's respective subject, as the other. They both seem to be the tricks of art divorced from nature. And whatever feats of activity, beyond our expectation, men by use and habit may be able to perform, though both their hands and feet be tied up within a certain compass; yet surely that ease, which attends on the natural motions of the body, when they are only assisted and not confined by rules of art, must be far more graceful and becoming:
at

to which it had attained in *Homer's* time. For let the Critics say what they will, about his

at least I am almost persuaded, that verse will never be missed in any poetry, that is worth the reading. Who ever thought of complaining, that the sublime passages we meet with throughout the Bible were not in metre: and indeed how little that circumstance would add to their worth, may in some sort be guessed at from those attempts, that have been made to supply this supposed defect.

The account, which *Quintilian* gives of this matter, is as follows. "*Poema, nemo duoitaverit imperito (or perito according to some Critics) quodam initio fufum, et aurium menfurâ, et fimiliter decurrentium spatiorum observatione effe generatum, non in eo repertos pedes.*" In another place we find him censuring those, *Qui Lyricorum quædam carmina in varias menfuras, coegerunt:*" When in fact they had been written originally in numbers (as *Horace* expresses it) "*lege solutis.*" And he makes this general observation—"nihil est profa scriptum, quod non redigi poffit in quædam verficulorum genera."

If fuch a fubject be worth attending to any farther; we may obferve, that the *Iambic* verfe, which feems to have been the earlieft, as it certainly is the moft natural, poetic meafure; is very little different from the common form of fpeech,

his natural simplicity, it would be hard, I suspect, to find many writers (except among the

speech, by whatever cause either in respiration or elsewhere that be determined. And as to the other more artificial kinds of versification, they appear to have been the workmanship of art running to excess. Critics have no good reason for their particular severity on rhymes for being unnatural; as the dactyle and spondee for ever closing the hexameter, and the still greater uniformity of the pentameter verse, are in reality as contrary to nature, as the repetition of the same or similar sounds can possibly be.

The utmost that can be said in favour of verse is, that some sort of music or harmony is essential to poetry. But as neither music nor harmony is occasioned by the bars or beats in music, which are only assistances to the performers; so neither can it be in poetry. A certain number of syllables, recurring in a determinate order, may be of service to the memory; but it is only their disposition or flow, which can in any degree be deemed musical. And though frequent repetitions of the same sounds may be necessary to make an impression on a bad ear; yet I suspect, if they be necessary at all, the less regular or uniform they are, the more pleasing they will be to a good one. What can be more harsh or grating, than verse read according

the visionary dreamers of romance) who abound in a greater luxuriancy of artificial
orna-

cording to the feet or scanning?—If indeed all poetry was to be sung to a certain tune, like some of our common ballads (which perhaps was formerly in a good degree the case) a definite number of syllables, or rather times, within certain limits, must undoubtedly become indispensably necessary. But as every one of any delicacy sees the absurdity of chanting a number of stanzas, of very different import, to the same musical sounds; it must surely for the same reason be allowed, that a constant repetition of the same sort of verse, even if it could be so varied by the *forte piano* of accents (or any other art in the management of *arsis* and *thesis*) as not to grow tedious or offensive to the ear, must to the judgment, on account of the various subjects and sentiments that arise, stand condemned, as highly improper. Suppose for example, that the *heroic* measure is peculiarly suited to *Epic* poetry;—whoever will consider the great variety of subjects and materials, that occur in the course of an *Epic* poem, must be of a very complaisant judgement indeed to imagine, that the same measure is equally adapted to all these. As well might he think, that the same uniform pomp of blank verse should be preserved in tragedy, whether the hero is stalking on the top
of

ornament than he does: of which, the anecdote *Herodotus* has given of him, "that he
was

of some elevated sentiment,—or is only ordering his menial servant to shut the door.

Though therefore it might perhaps be contrary to practice (and would indeed be directly against the positive decree of Aristotle) it could not surely be contrary to reason, to alter the measure in some degree, according to the particular passion or purpose, that is to be excited or expressed: just as Handel varies his music in the course of an oratorio, or even a concerto. The *Elegiac*, or the *Tragic* measure is certainly as much poetry as the *Heroic*. When therefore the turn of thought was adapted to these *flebilibus modis*, it could not in strictness surely be reckoned unpoetical to make use of them. An *Iambic* foot is also as true a poetic foot, as the *Dactyle* or the *Spondee*; what reason then can be given, why this might not as properly have a place in the heroic verse, as the dactyle and spondee in the iambic; only that the iambic being a more natural measure is more easy and complaisant? If it be said, that by being half a time too short, it would break in upon the legitimate length of the other verse; this defect might be easily supplied by throwing in a *Cretic* or a *Bacchic* foot to restore the balance; even where the same uniform time was required.

H

But

was a *schoolmaster*," at the same time that it accounts for some people's fondness for him, would

But in other cases, what should hinder the poet from making a free and promiscuous use of all the various feet and measures, as they happened best to suit his present purpose, provided only he was properly attentive to please the ear and satisfy the judgment? By which means poetry would be, what indeed it only naturally can be, a pleasing and harmonious modulation of numbers or sounds, without any fixt or regular returns; which, whatever charms they may have for others, can have no recommendation to the judicious, but such as use and habit gives them.

It has been said by some Critics, though I must own, I am not much inclined to believe them; that *Garrick* is unequal to the speaking of a long set speech: but if the fact be true, I should think it might be solved entirely to his honor; and might in some degree serve to confirm what is here advanced.—For how well soever the even tenor of verse may be suited to the powers of a mere tragic declaimer, nature delights not in such set forms; and therefore he, whose every expression, feature, and gesture, is regulated chiefly by her directions, may easily be supposed to fail, where his mistress is excluded: at least the difference in such cases

would be almost, without any other, a sufficient proof †.

But

cases between him and others will not be so striking.

Where indeed there is no vicious or bad tone, every one may be taught to read verse with equal propriety; just as by dint of syllogism every one may reason almost equally well upon any subject—but then he, who attends to the workings of nature, though it will require more pains and greater abilities, must undoubtedly in either case be a much more able performer.

As to writing or printing poetry in lines of a particular length, no one, but he who takes his ideas of music from his eyes, rather than from his ears, can think it at all material. The colon or two (:) dots in the midst of a verse in the psalms, might as well be thought essential to poetry—he who reads properly must neglect

H 2

both

† *It is with pleasure at the same time I take the opportunity of informing the English Reader from the same Author, (as it shews the scrupulous attention which he paid to truth) that Homer died of a common distemper, and not, as some had reported, of chagrin, at not being able to solve the ænigma, which some fisher-boys had puzzled him with, viz. "that, all they had taken, they had killed and left behind them, and what they could not take, they had brought home alive."*

But I would farther ask, from which of nature's storehouses he borrowed his machinery

both the one and the other, whatever helps they may be in certain cases : and why therefore should his eye be stopp'd (by any thing but the breadth of the page) where his voice must not? If Terence's plays had been printed like some of ours, without any reference to the length of lines ; what reader, who consulted either his ear or his judgment would have thought them less poetical?

Upon such a plan does the measure of *Ossian's* poems seem to be regulated.— There is the greatest attention paid in them to the spirit of harmony, without confining it to certain bounds. Could the Genius of Handel desire a finer verse for his purpose, than this in one of the above extracts—

“ Son of night retire : call thy winds and fly !”

and who can justly say, that this is at all injured, when at the end of the stanza it is repeated with the following variation of measure—“ Fly from my presence, son of night ! call thy winds and fly !”

They might as well say, that the poetry of those two lines from *Virgil* would be spoiled, if they were printed thus—

“ Post

chinery, Muses, Gods and Goddesses? And yet such crouds of these does he now and then

“ Post bellator equus, positis insignibus, Æthon
it lacrymans,—
Guttisque humectat grandibus ora.”

Though I have already extended this note, I'm afraid too far; I cannot help leaving with the reader the conclusion of the songs of Selma; that he may compare it with all the “*Exegi monumentum's—Jamque opus exegi's,*” &c. that he has ever met with.

“ Such were the words of the bards, in the days of the song: when the king heard the music of harps, and the tales of other times. The chiefs gathered from all their hills, and heard the lovely sound. They praised the voice of Cona! the first among a thousand bards. But age is now on my tongue; and my soul has failed. *I hear sometimes the ghosts of bards, and learn their pleasant song. But memory fails on my mind;* I hear the call of years. They say as they pass along, Why does Ossian sing? Soon shall he lie in the narrow house, and no bard shall raise his fame.”

“ Roll on, ye dark-brown years, for ye bring no joy on your course. Let the tomb open to Ossian, for his strength has failed. The sons of the song are gone to rest; *my voice remains, like*

then bring together, that in the small space of ten lines the reader is introduced to no less than 33 of them all together—book 18. ver. 37.

—————Θεαι δε μιν ἀμφαγερὸν οὐ—
 Εὐθ' ἀρ' ἐν Γλαυκῇ τε, Θαλαίᾳ τε, Κυμοδοκῇ τε,
 Νησαίῃ, Σπείῳ τε, Θοῇ δ', Ἀλίῃ τε Βοώπις,
 Κυμοθῇ τε, καὶ Ἀκταίῃ, καὶ Λιμνωρείᾳ,
 Καὶ Μελίῃ, καὶ Ἰαίρᾳ. καὶ Ἀμφίβοῃ, καὶ Ἀγαυῇ,
 Δῶϊ τε, Πρῶϊ τε, Φερουσαίᾳ τε, Δυναμένῃ τε,
 Δεξαμένῃ τε, καὶ Ἀμφινομῇ, καὶ Καλλιανείρᾳ,
 Δωρίς, καὶ Πανοπῇ, καὶ ἀγακλείῃ Γαλαίᾳ,
 Νημε-

a blast, that roars lonely on a sea-surrounded rock, after the winds are laid. The dark moss whistles there, and the distant mariner sees the waving trees."

As to the grand essentials, or other lesser virtues (as Mr. Hobbes styles them) of an *Heroic Poem*, I have purposely avoided all consideration of them in this slight review of the songs of *Ossian*; which I cannot help thinking are in some degree injured by the titles of *Epic* and *Dramatic Poems*. Though I have met sometimes with things called *Odes*, which in *Greek*, I suppose, meant what we call a song or a ballad, that if they had come abroad under these English appellations, would have appeared to great disadvantage.

Νημερτης τε, και Αψευδης, και Καλλιανασσα·
Ενθα δε ην Κλυμενη, Ιανειρα τε, και Ιανασσα,
Μειρα, και Ωρειθυια, εϋπλοκομος τ' Αμαθεια·

How does one pity the poor English translator; who had to tag all these into rhyme, and to get rid at the same time of near thirty conjunctions copulative! I cannot help subjoining his attempt, that the English reader may have some faint idea of the beauty of this passage: in which all that is not printed in *Italic*, is addititious.

Thalia, *Glauce* (every watry name)
Neræa mild, and silver *Spio* came:
Cymothoë and *Cymodoce* were nigh,
And the *blue languish* * of soft *Alia's* eye.
Their locks *Actæa*, and *Limnoria* rear,
Then *Proto*, *Doris*, *Panopè* appear,
Thoa, *Pherusa*, *Doto*, *Melita*;
Agauè gentle, and *Amphitboë* gay:

* This, which in the English is so exceedingly poetical, is in the original no more than ox-ey'd, broad-fac'd, or to put it at the softest, large or full-ey'd; for it can hardly be supposed that Homer thought much about the languishing quality of an ox's eye.

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Next *Callianira*, *Callianassa* show
 Their sister looks; *Dexamene* the flow,
 And swift *Dynamene*, now cut the tides;
Iæra now the verdant wave divides:
Nemertes with *Apseudes* lifts the head;
 Bright *Galatea* quits her pearly bed;
 These *Orythia*, *Clymene*, attend.
Mæra, *Amphinome* the train extend,
 And black *Janira*, and *Janassa* fair,
 And *Amathea*, with her amber hair.

Allusions, metaphors, and similes, it must be owned are the natural language of poetry, especially in it's early state. But whatever beauty shrubs, plants, or flowers may have in a country scene, they lose it all, when they are thrown together in Covent-garden market, or placed upon a pent-house in the city. When all is art besides, the parts of nature that are introduced are so far from giving beauty to the things about them, that they lose their own. A tree or an old ruin covered with ivy may appear natural enough; but who except some citizen, whose condescending taste it is to admire every thing he sees in the country, would say, that a modern, regular, in-
 habited

habited house in Edmonton or Putney, clad in this rustic garb, presented to his eye the same appearance?—All I mean is, that even natural objects may be placed in such a situation, as to seem in some degree unnatural. And if Homer wrote at a time, when men were too proud of art, to allow nature the first place, it is easy to suppose, that by being thrust into the second she might lose all grace and dignity.

How far indeed such general observations are just, can only be collected from an accurate examination of particulars; but that there are at least some grounds for the suspicion, may perhaps appear from the single instance of the manner, in which this poet makes use of *similes*. For a view of which I shall beg leave to refer the reader to that passage in his second book, where he describes the drawing up of the *Grecian* army: for every distinct part, movement, and appearance of which he has provided a correspondent *simile*; so that in the space of twenty-nine lines we are presented with no less than nine different comparisons.—*First* of all, the glittering of the soldiers armour is compared to a fire in the mountains burning up a wood. *In the next place,*
the

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the noise they make is resembled to the cackling, flapping of wings, &c. of a flock of geese, cranes, or especially *long-neck'd* * swans. *Thirdly*, their numbers are set before us ; and really one should think under a tolerably comprehensive similitude : for they are said to be as many, as there are leaves or blades of grass in a meadow. For fear however this might not be expressive enough of their multitude, another is immediately subjoined as an auxiliary ; and they are, compared to the many nations of flies, that swarm about a shepherd's cott at milking

* The propriety of this epithet for filling up the verse is to be sure peculiarly evident, δουλιχοδειρων being happily (by the slight insertion of an υψιλον) both a dactyle and a spondee, a property which few words can boast of ! but how it happens to be applied particularly to swans, when cranes are mentioned just before, and have seemingly as good a claim to it as the others, might be harder to determine : It would scarce make it easier, to suppose, it should be separated off by itself, and so indiscriminately applied to all the three ; for the dignity of the swan and crane would certainly be much injured by allotting them only a common epithet with a goose !

ing time *. Now this to be sure, in one sense, may be fairly called drawing from nature

* One cannot help observing here, how great either the poverty of the Greek language, or the carelessness and want of accuracy in the poet must have been; when we find *εθνεα πολλὰ* standing both for the similes and the thing compared; both for the men of the army, and for the flies, geese, cranes, &c. And *εν ὥρῃ* put singly in one line for some certain time of the year, as suppose, the *spring* (which however except through the courtesy of the reader being satisfied to take it in that sense, it no more signifies, than *time* does in English) and within three lines after, as if the poet had just recollected the necessity of adding a characteristic epithet, *ὥρῃ εν ειαρινῇ* meaning precisely the same point of time.—What says Eustathius to this? This, says he, is put “*ενελως;*” the other “*ελλειπτικως;*” just as we say “*ες παλριδα*” simply, instead of “*ες παλριδα γαιαν.*” Now if he had not *ενελως* lost his senses, must he not have seen, that to make the cases similar, it should have been, as we say, *ες γαιαν* simply, instead of *ες παλριδα γαιαν*—and whoever finds an instance of that sort, will find another blunder, which, unless he can mend better than Eustathius has done this, he had better quietly let

nature; as all these objects have undoubtedly a real existence in nature. But then, where are we to look either for the beauty or strength of the pencilling? What force do any of these similes, unless we except perhaps the first, add to their respective subjects?—The business however is by no means yet complete: We have seen nothing hitherto, but a croud of men getting together without order; which therefore to make an army must be marshalled into rank and file: the doing which by the different commanders is, the poet informs us, for all the world

it alone, with only this general argument in it's favour, that it is Greek and Homer, and therefore cannot be wrong. And yet what greater proof can be wanted to shew, that Homer's chief aim in all these cases was to find a proper number of syllables for his verse, ὑπεριδεῖν το πῶλον τε μέγρε, καὶ ἀναπληρῆν το κεχῆνος τε ῥυθμῶν—as *Lucian* has it? He left it to his readers to find a meaning; and he has undoubtedly met with some very complaisant ones. What would be thought of an English poet, who, for the purposes of rhyme, &c. should call in to his aid promiscuously all the various dialects of *Irish*, *Scotch*, *Welsh*, &c. as Homer has done those of his country?

world like a goatherd's separating two flocks of sheep or goats, that are improperly mixt together.—To close the whole, the Commander in chief is brought into view; and, for fear we should not think highly enough of him for being likened only to one God, he is divided into three several parts; and in one we are told he resembles *Jove*, in another *Mars*, and in a third *Neptune*. As if all this however were still too little to fill up the sublime idea, which the poet would give us of his Hero; he, who but three lines before was extremely like Jupiter, is now vastly like a Bull: and what is still better, Jupiter is made the author of giving him this new likeness; as if the God had thought it would be a greater honor to be like a Bull, than like himself—

Τοιον αὖρ' Ἀλγεῖδην θῆκε ΖΕΥΣ ἡμᾶσι κείνῳ.

Who that has not all the complaisance of old *Polonius* in the play, can possibly assent to the propriety of such a strange medley of unresembling similes?—*Hamlet*. “Do you see yonder cloud, that's almost in the shape of a camel?” *Polonius*. “By the mass, and 'tis like a camel, indeed!” *Ham*. “Me-

"Methinks it is like an ouzle." *Pol.* "It is black like an ouzle." *Ham.* "Or like a Whale?" *Pol.* "Very like a whale." *

As

* Let us hear once more what our old friend Eustathius says to these matters. "Some people, says he, may think, that after having compared his leader to three Gods, it is rather a sinking in the poet to liken him to a Bull: But it is in fact no such matter: on the contrary it is an *auxesis* throughout." Which he clearly proves by telling us that every body, who may not be able to comprehend the dignity of a God, is perfectly acquainted with the worth and princely nature of a Bull. The poet might it is true have compared him, as he does elsewhere, to a Lion, but this would not have answered at present. He then informs us of the specific difference between a *Bull* and an *Ox*: from whence he *naturally* proceeds to reckon up all the things that *Ταυρος* stands for, even to indecencies! very edifying, no doubt! for instance, "Οἱ δὲ ταυρος λεγέται ὡς οἶον τις γαυρος. ἢ ὡς τεινων τὴν οὐραν, λογῶν ἰδιοῦητος. ἐξ αὐτῆς τεινειν, ταυρος καὶ τὸ ὑπο τὸν ὄσχεον ὄθεν καὶ λασαυρος ὁ λασιος τὸν τοιούτον ταυρον.—And again ἐξ αὐτῆς, ταυρηδὸν ἐμβλεπεῖν, τὸ θυμικῶς ἐνθρανεῖν. καὶ ἀλαυρῶν γυνή ἢ αἰζυξ, δηλοῦσιν οἱ παλαιοί." Which, whatever it may be reckoned in the grave bishop
of

As Poetry and Painting are kindred arts and mutually explanatory of each other; let us just for a moment suppose this string of similes to be painted. Would not the picture be vastly like a piece of old Egyptian hieroglyphic; with a parcel of legs and arms, spears and helmets, heads of *Jupiter*, breasts of *Mars*, backs of *Neptune*, bulls, bees, geese, swans, cranes, flowers, leaves, grass, mountains, woods, and a huge fire in the midst to throw light on the whole; all tossed together *Παντ' ἀμα* (as the great Critic has it) like (to use another simile of a different sort) so many chips; when, as the Psalmist expresses it, "One heweth wood upon the earth." And the whole is so cunningly contrived, that it might almost serve for the pattern of a Turkey carpet—for if Homer had been sworn upon the Alcoran, he could not more effectually have avoided giving us any thing that might be deemed the resemblance of any one natural object.

One

of *Theſſalonica*, would certainly be called in *Tristram Shandy*, gross and indelicate. But poor *Tristram's* stars are against him!—Just the same lesson are we taught by *Didimus*, *Junius*, &c. And these are the people from whom we are to learn knowledge and taste!

One cannot help however observing here, of what singular use it is to a poet to have a Muse or two always at hand, ready to go upon any errand he may want to have performed. For without such assistance, what must have become of *Homer*, after exhausting his strength, as he must have done in these nine similes! It would have been impossible, as he very justly observes, *if he had had ten tongues and as many mouths to have put them in, the most uncracked voice, and lungs of brass*, for him to have gone through with the next piece of laborious business, which falls in his way; which is no less a work, than writing a complete list of the whole *Grecian* army and navy. It is but giving however a whoop or a whistle to the Muses in waiting—"Ἐσπεῖε νῦν μοι μούσαι"—And away they go to work immediately, and dispatch the whole affair for him in a trice, just as he would have it: whilst he, in the mean time, can take a nap to recruit his tired genius, for another trial of skill. *

The

* I have Eustathius's authority for this.
 "Ὅτι ἐστὶν ὅτε ὁ ποιητὴς καὶ αὖ ποσὰ τινα διαση-
 μάλα,

The advantage indeed of such assistance is so very evident, that there is scarce a poet from Homer's time to the present, who has not perceived it, and endeavoured to avail himself of it. And whether it be to shew themselves fitter objects of such assistance, or only from use and habit I know not; but they all affect not to be able to do any thing without it: not a foot can any of them stir, unless one of these old nurses will be kind enough to take hold of their leading-strings, and direct their steps. Such a bawling too do they keep for this purpose, that Lucina herself, I think, the goddess of hard labors, could never be more loudly solicited, than

I

these

μαῖα, ἐγκοπῇ τοῦ λόγου τῇ μουσῇ. καὶ ὡς ἐξ ὑπαρχῆς αὐτῆς αὐτὴν αἰετοί, εἰπὼν ὅπερ αὐτὸς εὖδει. ποιεῖ δὲ τῆλο, ἥνικα πραγμάτων ἐνύχῃ μεγάλῃ καὶ πλῆθει, αὐξὼν καὶ οὐτως ἐκείνα. Καὶ ἐνδείκνυμαι ὡς οὐκ ἀνεῦ Θεοῦ, λαὶ μουσικῆς ἐπιπνοίας, ἀφηγηθῆσονται.”

What a deal of trouble would it save Mess. the Publishers of our COURT KALENDAR, to have one of these prating gossips at hand to help them in their very extensive undertaking. I wonder they never tried the efficacy of an “Εσπέριε νυν μοι μούσαι,” if it were only just to get a compleat list of our army and navy!

these Midwives of Parnassus have been. And good reason, why: for if any thing is done amiss after using this precaution; it is clearly the muse's fault and not the poet's: besides, into how good a humour must it sooth a reader; * and how happily and easily is a beginning made, allowed to be the hardest part of any undertaking, by a little prittle-prattle prayer or invocation to a muse? Especially if she be any thing of a coy one, there is such a deal of whining to be used, to bring her into a tolerable humour, as to make this beginning literally what a poet (who I suppose knew what he said) has called it; that is, half the whole business.

I know not how it is, but I have contracted a peice of prejudice in this respect; which, I believe, I shall retain as long as I live—I cannot help fancying, that every man was born to see with his own eyes, to hear with his own ears, and to speak with his own tongue: nay moreover, if he has his senses in any tolerable degree of perfection, and will use them; that he may

* “Nam et benevolum auditorem, invocatio-
dearum, quas præsidere vatibus creditum est,
facit.” *Quintil.*

may not only perceive things in the gross, as it was intended they should appear to every one, who will be at the pains of looking at them; but may even discover their beauties and peculiarities: and consequently, that he may be able either to represent them himself, or at least, by a very easy comparison to find out, whether they are properly represented by others, who undertake to imitate them; be they poets, painters, or any other persons: that is for example, he may know, whether hair in a portrait is like hair growing upon a man's head, or only like a painted and curled piece of canvass: whether a mouth be like a mouth, or a patch of red sealing wax: whether the eyes look like eyes, or resemble rather two gimblet holes; and the same in other cases: for this likeness should obtain not only in portraits, but in every other imitation of nature. And even in remoter matters of proportion, distance, shade, colouring, keeping, attitude, grace, ease, &c. a sufficient knowledge may be acquired in the same easy manner, by bestowing only a little more attention.

They who have made it their business to consider these things, may, no doubt, be

able to lay down some general rules to shorten such inquiries, and to teach people how to conduct them with success. And they, who are acquainted with these rules, in examining any piece of art, will have the additional satisfaction of knowing, whether it is done agreeably to them, or not. But he, who shall look only at these rules, without using them as helps to look at nature, will infallibly be misled by them; especially if they were formed long ago, for reasons above-mentioned. The Horse, who neigh'd on being shewn his resemblance, drawn by *Apelles*, was, we may suppose, no great connoisseur in the art of painting; but yet *Apelles* thought proper to appeal to his judgment from that of those, who were: and I am firmly persuaded that there are even in our days animals of a much duller nature, than a horse; who are much better judges in this respect, than some of our own species, who have bartered their senses for a few terms of art. And I would as soon go to the tabernacle to learn sound religion, as be guided in my judgment by bigots and enthusiasts in any instance whatever.

I am

I am sufficiently apprised of the risque I run of forfeiting by such notions all pretensions to the character of virtù, sentiment, and even scholarship. * Which, I know, I could

* If I should be so unfortunate, I know not, whether I may not be tempted at last to give way to the pressing instances of my friends, and publish a work, which I have long had by me, and which cannot fail, I should hope, to retrieve my reputation. — This is no less than a DISSERTATION in the regular form (which when finished may possibly be comprised in one small folio volume, and will make a valuable addition to the *Archæologia Miscellanea*) on the *Roman BUTTON-HOLE*; settling first of all the difference between a loop and a button-hole; and proving in the next place the real existence of the latter, notwithstanding the silence of Authors about it; describing lastly it's size and shape, with the many various alterations it underwent at different periods of the Common-wealth; all deduced in the most easy and convincing manner, from a Collection of old *Roman FIBULÆ*, made and preserved with great care, by *Timothy Button*, Gent.

The whole is interspersed with a variety of notes, critical, political, and classical. Particularly among the latter, some light will be

I could have acquired with much less pains, than it has cost me to lose it. It is the easiest, and therefore commonly the first acquisition, which people make in any art or science, to get by rote a set of rules and terms of art. And as the translator of Homer justly observes, "to lift up our eyes, and talk of the genius of an ancient, is at once the cheapest way of shewing our own taste, and the shortest way of criticizing the wit of others our contemporaries."

But

thrown on that famous line in *Virgil*—"tereti subnectit fibula gemmâ"—Which the learned *Rueus* explains only in this general way—"Quæ rotunda, et in longum porrecta est."

At the end is added an *Appendix*, containing many probable conjectures about the name of this important part of Dress—which Dictionary writers, for want of such helps have been obliged to express by a kind of periphrasis; calling it a—"fissura cui inditur fibula,"—with many other curious particulars; which, on so extensive a subject, it is easier for the reader to conceive, than for me to enumerate; all tending to rescue this precious morsel of antiquity from the jaws of all devouring time, from whose relentless tooth it has already suffered too much injury!

But the proper end of all learning is undoubtedly the attainment of good sense; however its professors by growing fond of their art, and proud of the character which it procured them, have stopt short here, as men have done in many other instances, not only resting satisfied with the *means*, but bestowing all their care and skill to exalt and set it up above the *end*; which on the same account has been cautiously kept out of sight. What other reason can be assigned, why the two characters of a *scholar*, and a *man of sense*, have been so frequently divided, as it is notorious they have been? What cause can possibly be shewn in the nature of things, why a man, who gives himself up to study, provided he bestows his attention on proper objects, should be less sensible, than others? Can it be imagined that learning under such direction, as it is in a certain society (which I have mentioned already with pleasure, and never can mention but with respect; all perhaps that an author can do to promote its interests) can possibly be unattended by good sense? Such however has been the pride of art, that (as if the dignity and worth of learning would be lessened by any

mixture of what is sensible and useful with it!) whilst we have been prying with the most scrupulous nicety into the dirtiest corners of the remotest antiquity; it is astonishing to think, how intirely almost we have overlooked the spot, on which we stand; and how little we have reflected upon our own situation, or the means of improving it! by which strange proceeding it has come to pass, that many who would count it a disgrace not to be perfectly acquainted with the office of an *Ædile* or a *Prætor*, are as totally ignorant of every thing relative to a *Justice of Peace*, or a *Constable*,* as if they had

* I mean not the least offence to these worthy magistrates; but if the internal management of this kingdom had been as much attended to, as it deserves; can it be imagined that our peace and quiet would have been trusted, as they have been, solely to a set of old antiquated institutions, which without any other cause, must necessarily from the many alterations in our circumstances have become long ago extremely imperfect? as well might we still have left our public liberty to be defended against its enemies by an army of Archers and Billmen; because such an army was once able

had been born in the days of Julius Cæsar. — But if we are to live here, and *not in old Rome*; might it not be worth our while to know, how we could do this with the most happiness to ourselves, and the greatest benefit to the community? And if common sense be really, as it is said to be, the most difficult to be attained, and yet at the same time of far greater consequence, than any other; might it not be also worth our while to bestow a little more pains in teaching it, than is usually done?

As to the common route of school education, I firmly believe, that under a master, capable of giving the mind a turn for reflection, boys might spend their time more profitably in gathering flowers and catching butterflies, than in the trifling *hic & hæc* business of Grammar-schools: and that a few village instructors, who could teach the more obvious principles of husbandry; or to duller minds, even the proper handling of a spade or a mattock, would do more good, than half the *read and write* schools in the kingdom upon the present plan.

Yet

to conquer the French at the battle of Agincourt; and might be indeed at that time the best we could have brought into the field.

Yet thus it must for ever be, so long as men follow those for guides, who know nothing of the way; so long as they will absurdly look backward instead of forward, keeping their eyes fixt on times and places, which have been long since passed, instead of stretching them on to such points of view as lie still before them, and which from their present elevated and enlightened situation they might easily discover;—so long indeed, as the chief pains are bestowed in teaching us words, and it is left in a great measure to chance, whether ever we acquire any real knowledge! for it is just as likely, that they, who have always been kept up from air and exercise, should have strong and active bodies; as that they, whose spirits have been cramped within the narrow bounds of a confined education, should have vigorous and inquisitive minds, or any desire of venturing abroad into the large and extensive field of science. With whose produce they are not more unacquainted, than they are unwilling and unable to cultivate it, if they were; their turn is better suited to the domestic employment of spinning an hypothesis; knotting a rebus; netting a riddle; or unravelling some

some trifling puzzle, which perhaps things like themselves have made.

Whether it be however, that people have begun to discover the true value of ancient learning, and the immoderate degree of attention, which has long been paid to things of little import, I know not: but to some it may perhaps seem, that the heat of these studies is at present rather abated. If this be in fact the case; the very worst period for instruction will probably be that, in which the old method is found to be ineffectual, and yet no other is substituted in its place. It deserves therefore the serious consideration of the Learned to supply this defect. The difficulty of doing which completely ought to be no reason against attempting it. And indeed however difficult it may be to lay down an intire and unexceptionable plan in a matter of such importance as education is, and still more so to persuade people to receive it; yet there are some general principles, which one should think, could hardly fail of recommending themselves to every candid person's judgment and approbation: such for instance, as that the first steps to learning should be made as easy and as inviting, as possible:

possible : and that the things, which should be principally learnt, ought to be such, as are most intimately connected with the general welfare of society, or of individuals living in it ; and afterwards more remote knowledge. What should we think of him, who in order to teach his child to walk, should place it on a wire ; or who, before it had learnt to eat, should set about teaching it to talk. *

If

* I heartily wish the ingenious *Shandy*, in that new map of the human mind, which he is publishing, had given as a fuller and more accurate chart, with some of the principal bearings and soundings, of that *North-west Passage* to the intellectual world ; which he has only just transiently mentioned, and very faintly sketched out : here a few *stars* might have properly been thrown in, and could not have given offence even to the most rigid caviller at *Astrology*. As it would certainly be of the highest use to all future navigators to be fully acquainted with this new and important discovery—I care not if he had even a part of the reward assigned him, which is voted by Parliament for the discovery of the Longitude : I mean however only so much of it, as will not be allotted to Mr. *Harrison* ; who perhaps deserves it all.

If the principles above advanced be true, no science, nor indeed any love for science can be acquired (at least with half the ease it otherwise might; unless we give this venerable name to a little knack at phraseology and the wire-drawing of words) from reading the Ancients. In the present advanced state of knowledge all the use, which they can properly be put to, seems to be merely this; that after the mind has been furnished with juster notions, than can be derived from them, it might be matter of entertainment and useful curiosity to see how these things were formerly understood. And as none would then think of engaging in such a kind of study, but minds of an inquisitive turn; a deal of useful time would be saved to those, who had no turn this way; and who yet, upon the present plan of education, are many of them obliged to drudge on at it for years: By which means they can learn nothing but a dislike to all learning whatever, finding the road to that, which they had been fixt down to, so intricate and unentertaining. Whereas on the contrary a boy, who had learnt, for instance, to relish English poetry; might easily, from the love of a science which had given him so much pleasure,

pleasure, be induced to examine, in what state it formerly was: When, by having besides some object in view, and some principles to judge by, he might reap some benefit from the examination; which, in the right-on way the classics are commonly read, can never be expected. And so in higher matters, *morality, medicine* and such like.

Neither is there so much difficulty in learning a language, as we are usually given to understand; when it is undertaken out of a prospect of pleasure; with a good will; and by such, as have sense enough to cut off a parcel of useless and tedious preparatives. Suppose they who learn it thus, may not have time to attend to every minute allusion to usages and customs, now no more; they would easily attain it's general idioms, and be able to relish it's higher and more sublime beauties.

Lastly, as I set out with my own, I now appeal to the experience of all others, whether boys otherwise taught, unless they have a turn for enquiry given them from some other quarter, ever attain to a knowledge of any science at all. And farther I would ask, whether most of those great names,
who

who have carried forwards the boundaries of knowledge, have not been such, as were either very little indebted to ancient learning; or had strength enough to free themselves from its shackles, and view things for themselves. Whether *Shakespear*, *Locke*, and *Newton* were not men of this cast: and whether *Bacon*, who seems to have been the most thoroughly acquainted with ancient learning, did not reject it's principles, and devise others in their stead? whose sentiments concerning some old authors, of chief note amongst us, that I may not seem intirely singular in my opinion, I shall now beg leave to lay before the reader. "*Plane autem non dissimulo, says he, mihi quopiam submovendos esse philosophastros istos, poetis fabulatores, stupratores animorum, rerum falsarios, &c.—Verum tutius forsitan eos nominatim damnare, ne cum tanta auctoritate vigeant, non nominati excepti videantur, &c.—Citetur itaque Aristoteles, pessimus sophista, inutili subtilitate attonitus, verborum vile ludibrium. Ausus etiam, tum cum forte mens humana ad veritatem aliquam casu quopiam tanquam secundâ tempestate delata acquiesceret, injicere durissimas animis compedes, artemque quandam insanie componere, nosque verbis ad-*
discere.

discere. Quin ex istius sinu educti nobis sunt, et enutriti, vaferrimi illi nugatores, qui cum a perambulatione mundana, ac omni rerum ac historiae luce se avertissent, ex hujus maximi præceptorum ac positionum ductili admodum materia, et ingenii inquieta agitatione numerosissimas scholarum quisquiliis nobis exhibuere. Iste autem **HORUM DICTATOR** tanto illis accusatior, quod etiam in apertis historiae versatus, subterraneæ alicujus specus opacissima idola retulit. Atque super ipsam quidem historiam rerum particularium quasdam veluti operas aranearum extruxit; quas causas videri vult, cum sint nullius prorsus roboris vel pretii." — "Citetur jam et Plato; cavillator urbanus, tumidus poeta, theologus mente captus. Tu certè dum rumores nescio quos philosophicos limares et simul committeres, ac scientiam dissimulando simulares, animosque vagis inductionibus tentares et exsolveres, vel litteratorum vel civilium virorum convivii sermones, vel etiam sermonibus quotidianis gratiam et amorem subministrare potuisti. Verum cum veritatem humane mentis incolam, veluti indigenam nec aliunde commigrantem mentireris, animosque nostros, ad historiam et res ipsas nunquam satis applicatos et reductos, averteres, ac se subingredi ac in suis tæcis et confusissimis idolis

lis volutare, contemplationis nomine doceres; tum demum fraudem capitale admisisti. Deinde etiam tu, scelere haud minore, stultitiæ apothecam introduxisti, et vilissimas cogitationes religione munire ausus es. Nam levius malum est, quod philologorum parens exististi, ac tuo ductu et auspiciis plurimi ingenii fama, et cogitationis rerum populari et molli jucunditate capti et contenti, severiorem veri pervestigationem corruerunt. Inter quos fuere M. Cicero, et Annaeus, et Seneca, et Plutarchus Cæronæus, et complures alii, ne-
rignum his pares.” There are many other characters, drawn in equally strong colors, to be met with in the original——Which ought to be written in letters of Gold; or rather indeed in good sterling English, that all the people of this land might see and read it.

To shew that this is no jesting matter in this great Author hear his conclusion.

“Ego vero adversus istos omnes minora, quam pro ipsorum fontissimo reatu, dixi. Tu tamen fortasse, minus istam redargutionem intelligis. Nam pro certo habeas, fili, sententias istas, quas adversus istos tuli, nihil minus esse, quam contumeliam. Verum sub maledicti velo miras accusationum animas, et singulari artificio in

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singula fere verba contractas et reductas, et exquisitissimâ oculi acie in ipsa criminum ulcera directas et vibratas, postmodo respiciens videbis. Atque cum isti criminibus et reatu valde inter se mixti et implicati forent, tamen singulos indiciis maxime propriis, iisdem autem capitalibus, reos feci." Imp. Phil. Cap. 9.

I shall leave the reader to make his own reflections on the above-cited passages—adding only this single wish; that, whilst every body is ready to complain of the decline of learning and the badness of the times, they would not so inconsistently as they do, leave it solely to these times, bad as they describe them, to remedy those very defects, of which their badness is supposed to be the principal cause!

F I N I S.